

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



June 2015

Vol. 120, No. 6

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Reason versus Religion—II*

People who deny the efficacy of any rationalistic investigation into religion seem to me somewhat to be contradicting themselves. For instance, the Christian claims that his religion is the only true one, because it was revealed to so-and-so. The Mohammedan makes the same claim for his religion; his is the only true one, because it was revealed to so-and-so. How is this to be decided? Certainly not by the books, because the books, fighting between themselves, cannot be the judges. Decidedly then we have to admit that there is something more universal than these books, something higher than all the ethical codes that are in the world, something which can judge between the strength of Law inspirations of different nations. Whether we declare it boldly, clearly, or not—it is evident that here we appeal to reason. Now the question arises if this light of reason is able to judge between inspiration and inspiration, and if this light can uphold its standard when the quarrel is between prophet and prophet, if it has the power of understanding anything whatsoever of religion. If it has not, nothing can determine the hopeless fight of books and prophets which has been going on through ages; for it means that all religions are mere lies, hopelessly contradictory, without any constant idea of ethics. The proof of religion depends on the truth of the constitution of man, and not on any books. These books are the outgoings, the effects of man's



constitution; man made these books. We are yet to see the books that made man. Reason is equally an effect of that common cause, the constitution of man, where our appeal must be. What do I mean by reason? I mean what every educated man or woman is wanting to do at the present time, to apply the discoveries of secular knowledge to religion. The first principle of reasoning is that the particular is explained by the general, the general by the more general, until we come to the universal. For instance, we have the idea of law. If something happens and we believe that it is the effect of such and such a law, we are satisfied; that is an explanation for us. What we mean by that explanation is that it is proved that this one effect, which had dissatisfied us, is only one particular of a general mass of occurrences which we designate by the word 'law'. When one apple fell, Newton was disturbed; but when he found that all apples fell, it was gravitation, and he was satisfied. This is one principle of human knowledge.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 1.378–79.

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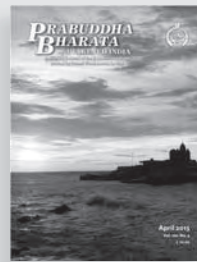
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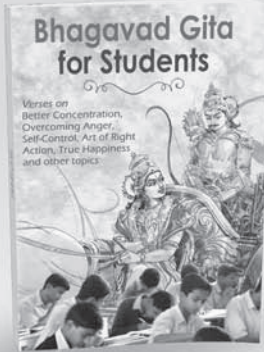
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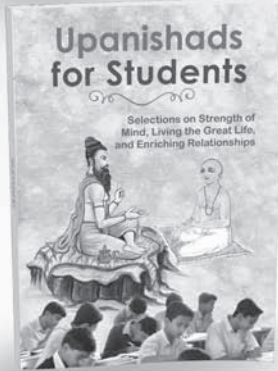
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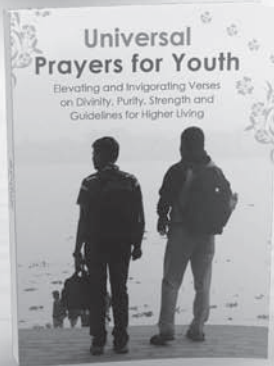
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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

June 2015
Vol. 120, No. 6

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

यो ह खलु वावोपरिस्थः श्रूयते गुणेष्विवोर्ध्वरितसः स वा एष शुद्धः पूतः शून्यः शान्तोऽप्राणो
निरात्मानन्तोऽक्षय्यः स्थिरः शाश्वतोऽजः स्वतन्त्रः स्वे महिम्नि तिष्ठत्यजेनेदं शरीरं चेतनवत्
प्रतिष्ठापितं प्रचोदयिता वैषोऽप्यस्येति । ते होचुर्भगवन् कथमनेनेदृशेनानिष्टेनैतद्विधमिदं चेतनवत्
प्रतिष्ठापितं प्रचोदयिता वैषोऽस्य कथमिति तान् होवाच । ॥ २.४ ॥

*Yo ha khalu vavoparisthah shruyate guneshvivordhvaretasah sa va esha shuddhah putah
shunyah shanto'prano niratmananto'kshayyah sthirah shashvato'jah svatantrah sve mahimni
tishtatyajenedam shariram chetanaavat pratishtapitam prachodayita vaisho'pyasyeti. Te
hochurbhagavan katham-anedrishen-anishtenaitadvidham-idam chetanaavat pratishtapitam
prachodayita vaisho'sya kathamiti tan hovacha. (2.4)*

He who is known to be standing aloof amidst qualities, like those having unbroken celibacy, is indeed clean, pure, void, tranquil, breathless, mindless, endless, undecaying, steadfast, eternal, unborn, and independent. He abides in his own greatness. By him this body is set up as possessing intelligence, or in other words, this one, indeed, is its driver too. Then they said, 'How, Revered sir, by this kind of desireless being is this sort of thing set up as possessing intelligence, or in other words, how is this one its mover?' Then he said to them. (2.4)

THIS MONTH

WE SUFFER FROM an intrinsic defect in our beings. This is a problem that needs to be addressed if we need to attain peace and fulfilment. **The Inward Gaze** deals with our 'manufacturing defect' of seeing only the external and not the internal. It also discusses how to get rid of it.

In **Women Gurus in Hinduism**, Karen Pechilis, NEH distinguished professor of humanities and professor of Asian and comparative religions at Drew University, New Jersey, discusses various aspects of the lives and public work of women spiritual leaders in Hinduism.

Durga is the goddess of the conquest of good over evil. She is worshipped in all splendour across the world. Her form has deeper meaning hidden from the casual eye. This deeper significance and its meaning in our lives is brought out in **Durga** by Alok Dutta, a litterateur, artist, and social activist from Kolkata.

Finding Vedanta is the story of the coming to Vedanta as a path to peace and fulfilment by Peter Kowalke, a volunteer at the Vedanta Society of New York and an avid traveller.

Prayer and meditation have functions beyond religion. They have social and therapeutic roles. **The Power and Mystery of Prayer and Meditation** is a sociological study of these activities by Dan A Chekki, emeritus professor of sociology at the University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg.

In the second and final instalment of **The Diseases of Modern Life and the Ayurvedic Approach**, a complete framework for leading a healthy life with a holistic vision is outlined

by Dr Bhaswati Bhattacharya, research scholar of Ayurveda at the Banaras Hindu University, clinical assistant professor of family medicine at Weill-Cornell Medical College, New York, and the founder-director of The Dinacharya Institute, New York.

Swami Vivekananda's involvement in Freemasonry and how he adopted many of its tenets are discussed in the fourth and final instalment of **Masonic Vedanta** by Guy L Beck, a scholar, author, musician, educator, historian of religions, musicologist, a Fulbright-Nehru senior research fellow and visiting fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford University, UK, lecturer in religious studies and Asian studies at Tulane University; and adjunct professor of religious studies at Loyola University, New Orleans.

In the fifth instalment of **Memory**, Swami Satyamayananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur, explains the identity of the self, the concepts of karma and rebirth, and discusses how mental impressions, *samskaras*, are formed and also compares it with Plato's doctrine of anamnesis.

Encountering Religion in the Workplace is a book by Raymond F Gregory, who practised as an attorney in New York for more than forty years, specialising in employment discrimination. Using some case studies, he elaborates on various implications of and difficulties arising out of mixing religion and work, both in the factory and in the office. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

The Inward Gaze

AMOVING TRAIN. Scenes flying past. Sitting by the window it is wondrous and delightful to watch every tree, every house, animal, or human speeding away, seemingly impatient to give a better glimpse, to give time for interaction, time to get to know one another. Things that one comes across all the time assume a different meaning when seen from the window seat of a train. The river seems mightier and the flow stronger when seen from this window seat. Trying to get a complete picture of the length and breadth of the river through the gaps of the railings of the bridge, the same river one has seen countless times from the banks seems newer and beyond grasp. Trying to look at the river's depth from up above, somehow our height seems to be growing and the riverbed going farther and farther. The coin dropped into the river makes a clanging sound when it almost always hits the railings or the rails of the bridge. One feels like asking, 'What is happening?' The correct question should be: 'Who is moving?'

Indeed, who is moving? The river did not change, nor did the bridge. The railings and rails were firmly held in place. It was the person on the window seat who was moving along with the train, of course. No tree, house, animal, or human shifted in the fleeting second of the window-seat vision. It was the window seat that did not stop. It did not have time. It was not stationary though that was the apparent perception. It was not firmly held in place though again that was the perception. Why

this wrong perception? Because of the wrong input to the brain. What was the wrong input? That the things outside the train are moving and not the train itself. Why did this happen?

There is a serious manufacturing defect that our senses have that they can see only outside, the external.

Because of a defect in the input mechanism like the eyes. But this defect is not limited to the eyes, but is present in all the five senses we have—the senses of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing.

There is a serious defect, a manufacturing defect that our senses have. Yes, even God, the almighty, is not an error-free manufacturer! What is the defect? If the eyes were to see, why cannot they see inside your body, the state of different organs? If the ears could hear, why do not they hear your organs, why do not they hear the different sounds produced in your body? If the skin could touch, why does it not touch your organs, why does it not touch your heart? If the tongue could taste, why cannot it taste the not-so-tasty things inside your body? And if your nose could really smell, why is it blissfully unaware of the stench inside your body while being considerably perturbed by the comparably more pleasant smell of the nearest trashcan! This is the defect of our sense organs, the manufacturing defect that they can see only outside, the external. They cannot see inside. Unlike the surveillance cameras so common nowadays, these

camera-like sense organs of ours cannot rotate 360 degrees; they cannot rotate even 180 degrees. This is the problem.


This problem has two levels: the individual and the collective. At the individual level, the problem of the outward gaze keeps us preoccupied with the problems of others, other beings or things. We are always concerned with this person or that thing and set out to correct them, all the time unaware of the manifold problems we are suffering from, both physical and mental. These are the symptoms of the deeper problem of not understanding our true nature, which is spiritual. If we desire material or spiritual success, if we desire peace, we need to turn our gaze inwards. This inward gaze alone can protect us from suffering and trouble. Just like machines that come with a self-repairing mechanism, we need to develop a self-analysing and self-correcting mechanism. Sitting on the window seat of life, we should constantly turn our vision 180 degrees to ourselves and understand that the perception of fleeting objects is caused because we do not have the patience to pause. We do not have the patience to analyse and discern.

If we need peace, we need to take a moment and analyse this life of ours, its pace and its destination. Where are we headed to? What pace are we travelling in? Such questions need to be asked constantly and at every moment of our lives. The inward gaze has to be so penetrating that we should be able to see through the facade of body and mind, into our very soul, the indwelling Atman.

At the collective level, groups, societies, cultures, and nations are busy pointing fingers at other collectives, forgetting to do some soul-searching themselves. We are busy finding defects elsewhere and forget to check for faults back home. Rarely does a group accept its fault, it is always about how it was someone else's

fault, and it is always because this country or that group created some trouble.

The solution to the problem of the outward gaze, the problem of outgoing perception at both these levels, lies in correcting the individual gaze, in turning it inwards. It was as though God was afraid of the consequences of our gaze turning inwards and chose to keep us busy dwelling on external objects or beings! The Almighty preferred to tear us apart by the pulls of five senses in not just five but countless directions! But some people who can show the mirror to the senses—not just seeing their reflections in mirrors—people who have the patience to pause, they start turning their gaze inwards, and they start their journey towards peace and fulfilment.

A machine constantly engaged in production, a machine that is constantly working cannot get any time for maintenance or repair. Similarly, if we were to constantly engage or involve with external objects or perceptions, we would be unable to correct ourselves. Every performing artist knows the importance and utility of a monitor on the stage. Whether it is the dance step, the cadence of one's voice, or the right facial expression, every artist needs to know her or his performance even while it is going on. We need a monitor not unlike that on the stage, on the stage of our life too. We need to be constantly on the alert and check on ourselves for problems, passions, troubles, and wrong perceptions. We would then also be able to better control our sense organs, we would be able to better manoeuvre these cameras and turn them in a diametrically opposite direction. We would then be able to use these devices in a way we really need to and not get bogged down by the pulls of the externals but would be rooted in our internal being. Then we would understand that it is not the things outside the train but it is the train and the window seat and us sitting on it, that are moving. 

Women Gurus in Hinduism

Karen Pechilis

HINDU FEMALE GURUS are highly visible in the contemporary world as spiritual leaders. Examples of well-known female gurus include Amma Sri Karunamayi, Ammachi Mata Amritanandamayi, Anandamurthi Guruma, Gangaji, Gurumatha Amma, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, Mother Meera, Sri Maa, and Sri Anandi Ma. All of these female gurus have worldwide outreach through their official websites on the internet, which provide information on their teachings and organisations, and sometimes biographical information.¹ Two of these gurus, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda of Siddha Yoga and Mata Amritanandamayi, Ammachi, are especially prominent in terms of number of global followers and ashramas. Many female gurus have received humanitarian awards; for example, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, who attained mahasamadhi on 13 April 2012, has received numerous awards, including the Gandhi Foundation Award in 2007, in recognition of her service as an advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS since the 1990s, which involved caring for infected persons at her Kashi Ashrama in Sebastian, Florida. The international fame and authority of these female gurus stands in marked contrast to the long historical pattern in Hindu tradition, which restricts the role of authoritative guru who has a public presence to men.

History

‘Guru’ is a classical term and role in Hinduism. It has several meanings including ‘weighty’ and

‘dispeller of darkness.’² In the corpus of the earliest scripture in Hinduism, the Vedas, the term is used in the philosophical Upanishads, where it describes a person who has ultimate knowledge. The earliest references are found in two Upanishads that probably date to about 300 BCE. In the Mundaka Upanishad, a ‘great householder’ named Shaunaka approached the Vedic sage Angiras and asked him: ‘O adorable sir, (which is that thing) which having been known, all this becomes known?’³ The sage provided a detailed reply, which included a description of the necessity to become detached from the world and its swirl of action through teaching by a guru who is centered in the ultimate principle, Brahman.⁴ A second early reference is from the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, which refers to knowledge of Brahman as a ‘supreme secret’ that ‘should not be given to one who is not at peace, nor yet to one who is not a son or a student.’ The text also speaks of the necessity of devotion towards both god and guru.⁵ Thus, teaching, knowledge, initiation, and devotion are hallmarks of the guru in these early scriptures. Significantly, the scriptures presume that the guru is male.

Other classical texts apply these teachings to the life of an upper-caste boy. An upper-caste boy’s student hood, which transitioned him from child to adult, was spent with a guru. Initiation, *upanayana*, took place for boys of the permitted castes between the ages of eight and twelve, as an important life cycle rite, *samskara*, that initiated the boy into three domains: human society, study of the Vedas, and the practice of

the fire sacrifice. It transitioned the boy from biological birth to social status, replacing the mother: 'Upanayana was thus a socio-ontological birth in opposition to a defective natural birth, and was designed to rectify biological faults and construct a more substantial existence for the young boy.'⁶ Thus, it transformed the boy through sacred knowledge imparted by a guru, with whom the child was said to have a more intimate relationship than with his biological father, as demonstrated by the resemblance of the initiation rituals to those of marriage, as well as the custom of the boy becoming a member of the teacher's family.⁷

Living with the guru highlights the seriousness of the relationship and the teaching for boys, while it indicates that this system excluded young girls. Girls only left their family homes after marriage and after puberty—marriage is the most important ritual for girls and it is the counterpart to the boys' *upanayana*. When we hear of educated women in classical Indian tradition, they are firmly located in the family context. For example, the female sage Gargi Vachaknavi, who acts as a guru to male disputants in a debate in one of the earliest Upanishads, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (ca. 700 BCE), is not represented as having studied with a guru; rather, she is in the family line of the renowned sage Garga. Later texts in which women are explicitly portrayed as gurus, such as the *Yoga Vasishtha* (YV) and the *Tripura Rahasya* (TR) (both ca. 1300 CE), represent them as wives who are gurus to their husbands, again joining women's knowledge with family location. This suggests that for women, family is equivalent to staying with the guru—one learns from a relative who is a sage, or one takes spiritual instruction together with one's husband from a guru.⁸

Stories of women acting as gurus in the public sphere, Gargi in the Upanishads, and

acknowledged as guru in the private sphere, Queen Chudala in the YV and Princess Hemalekha in the TR, suggest a new dimension to knowledge acquisition by joining spiritual knowledge to personal experience in the world. Within the dominant tradition of male gurus, personal insight is valued in the context of structures such as a guru lineage, received teachings, and emulation of a specific guru as practised in the intimacy of the *gurukula* system. In contrast, a prominent theme in the tradition of female gurus is personal experience both in the sense of independent spiritual realisation outside of initiation in a lineage—many female gurus are self-initiated—as well as a pragmatic orientation that relates experience of the world to spiritual knowledge. Personal experience was especially significant to women and served as a cornerstone of their authority since they were not originally included in the definition of guru. Thus, instead of relying on the de facto qualification by gender open to men, women who wished to have the authority of a spiritual teacher had to innovate with what was at hand.⁹

It is important to contextualise classical stories of female gurus with the wealth of literary references to exemplary spiritual women in Hindu history. For example, spiritual women are depicted in India's great epics, such as Sulaabha from the Mahabharata, who won a debate with the philosopher-king Janaka in front of learned brahmin scholars, and Shabari from the Ramayana, who was blessed with a vision of Rama at her ashrama. Historical female bhakti saints who authored devotional poetry, such as Karaikkal Ammaiyar (sixth century CE), Andal (ninth century CE), Mahadeviyakka (twelfth century CE), and Mirabai (sixteenth century CE), demonstrate that women have participated actively in Hindu tradition across the centuries.

There is a difference, though, between the categories of ascetic and devotee or saint on the one hand, and guru on the other. In the main, an ascetic or devotee can perform that role by adopting established cultural ways of behaviour, but a guru needs the recognition of an audience in order to be a guru. Of course in certain cases the ascetic does need to be perceived by others as authentic, such as if the ascetic is a member of an order, or if the ascetic plans to seek alms from householders. Also, devotees need to have public recognition in order to become saints. In addition, there is elasticity to the title of guru; in theory, anyone can be a guru to anyone, and this does not require public recognition. As well, there is an elasticity of content to the guru, which Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikagame have intriguingly discussed as 'uncontainability': 'Perhaps the quality most common to the guru across its manifold individuals, institutions and logics is that of uncontainability. Guru-ship is a suggestible form: as a principle-cum-model it affords movement between domains; the extension and transformation of modes of power; scaling up/down; the expansion/containment of persons.'¹⁰ However, even given these nuances the categories of ascetic, devotee or saint, and guru were defined distinctively in classical tradition. An ascetic and a devotee or saint are associated with autonomy. A guru requires a critical mass of followers or disciples to bestow that title. A guru cannot perform as a 'guru' without recognition as such by another; 'guru' is a third-person term, not something one calls oneself.

Stories of historical female gurus from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, such as Sita Devi (flourished in 1490), Bahinabai (1628–1700), Gauribai (1759–1809), and Tarigonda Venkamamba (popularly Venkamma, flourished in 1840) make it clear that it was exactly the issue

of the public recognition of a woman as a guru that was controversial; Bahinabai was a wife and the other three women were widows when they began to act as gurus, and they experienced resistance from husband and/or community.¹¹ This barrier was definitively dismantled by female gurus at the turn of and into the twentieth century, in part because their spiritual achievements were supported by men. For example, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi (1853–1920), the wife and spiritual companion of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886), supported her companion Gauri Ma (1857–1938), a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in establishing the first women's ashrama in 1895 in Kolkata, which was inspired by Sri Ramakrishna and named Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama.¹² The Mother (Mirra Alfassa, 1878–1983) was the appointed successor of Sri Aurobindo, and Anandamayī Ma's

Mirabai



(1896–1982) husband was her disciple.¹³ These important female gurus, who lived and served in India, achieved worldwide renown.

The contribution of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) to the internationalisation of the figure of the guru cannot be overstated. In his renowned speech at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair in Chicago, Swami Vivekananda presented Hinduism, in the form of neo-Vedanta, as a living tradition that is relevant to the contemporary West. His presentation, which emphasised that Hinduism taught the world tolerance and unity, was convincing and compelling to a diverse Western audience. In the year after his talk, he travelled in the US as an authentic teacher of Hinduism, lecturing to groups such as Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, and Theosophists. He also established the Vedanta Society in New York, which was the first Hindu organisation designed to attract American adherents;¹⁴ this center still flourishes today.¹⁵

Swami Vivekananda established a paradigm of guru that paved the way for others, including Baba Premanand Bharati (1858–1913), a Bengali follower of Sri Chaitanya, who lectured in the US for five years and established the Krishna Samaj at the turn of the century; Swami Paramananda (1884–1940), who spent two years as an assistant at the New York Vedanta Society before establishing his own Vedanta Societies in the Boston and Los Angeles areas and founded Ananda Ashrama, a mountain retreat in southern California in 1923; and Swami Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), who came to America in 1920 as a delegate to the International Congress of Religious Liberals held in Boston, then settled in America and founded the Yogoda Satsanga Society, Self-Realization Fellowship.¹⁶ In the US context, the paths of these gurus resonated with a deep American stream of thought that emphasised direct spiritual awakening or

enlightenment. Arthur Versluis has recently termed this perspective 'immediatism' and has traced its path from Ralph Waldo Emerson through various twentieth-century literary religious movements to contemporary gurus, especially neo-Vedanta gurus.¹⁷ If Swami Vivekananda and other gurus in the first part of the twentieth century constitute a first wave of gurus in the United States, and gurus such as A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977) of ISKCON, Swami Muktananda (1908–1982) of Siddha Yoga, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918–2008) of Transcendental Meditation constitute a second wave of gurus, then female gurus constitute a third wave of gurus in the US.

While female gurus participate in the classical paradigm of guru as enlightened teacher, they are of course adapting the category as well, in both gendered and contemporary ways. We have already seen that in historical times female gurus were subject to issues of social acceptance, and that they brought an emphasis on personal experience as constitutive of authority to the role of guru; these factors continue to shape the female guru in today's world. What we also find today is female gurus' emphasis on community, especially in the sense of social service.

Female Gurus and Social Expectations for Women

The key to understanding female gurus' status with respect to social expectations is to acknowledge that as religious leaders they are in the public eye. As we saw, early female gurus from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries experienced controversy on their social status, and female gurus in the twentieth century such as Gauri Ma, the Mother, and Anandamayi Ma made the transition into public acceptance at least in part due to the support from men. Today, public social expectations in Hinduism for both women

and men continue to enjoin them to marry and produce children, with a premium on sons. Thus, there are pressures on members of both genders who express an interest in becoming independent spiritual authorities. However, as Meena Khandelwal explains, for a variety of cultural reasons the pressures on women are greater:

Given the importance of heterosexual marriage and procreation in South Asian cultures generally, a man's decision to renounce householder life is likely to be met by opposition from family and society; this is especially true if he is either young and unmarried or married with dependents at home. Even so, there are scriptural, historical, and contemporary precedents for male renunciation at any age, and so it is considered a legitimate path for men even if discouraged by kin. Marriage is even more compulsory for women, and for this reason most research on South Asian women has focused on their domestic lives. While most women in South Asia aspire to obtain a good husband, kind in-laws, and healthy children, those who do not are likely to face intense pressure to conform.¹⁸

What Sondra Hausner and Meena Khandelwal say about female ascetics applies to female gurus as well: 'All have wondered whether to marry, remarry, or stay married, and have struggled with how to negotiate the unquestioned South Asian social value of having a husband and being a wife.'¹⁹

Thus, female gurus exhibit multiple models on the issue of marriage and childbirth. Some left their husbands and families to become gurus; for example, the Italian-American guru Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati had a husband and three children but left them prior to becoming a guru,²⁰ and the guru Shakti Devi divorced her husband in order to marry her guru.²¹ Some are married; for example, both gurus Madhobi Ma and Sai Rajarajeshwari were compelled by their male gurus to marry, over their objections at first, the latter by

Sri Satya Sai Baba (73, 85–6). Anandamayi Ma was married but her marriage was said not to have been consummated and her husband was her disciple,²² Mother Meera is married but her husband does not play a role in her mission,²³ and Ganga Giri is married and has adult children but lives apart from her husband.²⁴ For some, their refusal to marry caused conflict in their families; for example, the gurus Gauri Ma²⁵ and Ammachi.²⁶ For some, the issue does not overtly arise in their biographies, such as the gurus Karunamayi Ma,²⁷ Gurumayi,²⁸ and Shree Maa.²⁹

The pattern in this diversity is that the female guru's primary identity is as a religious exemplar and not as a sexually-defined wife and mother. A major component from classical definitions is that a religious exemplar embodies autonomy and self-discipline, and we see these principles informing female gurus' diverse decisions on their personal identities, which in all cases marginalise their sexuality in favour of their spirituality. Part of the issue here is patriarchal culture's paradoxical image of women and sex—women are represented to lack sexual self-control, yet they are not supposed to take any pleasure in sex whatsoever, and so their sexuality must be controlled by a husband. Spiritual women decenter this image of 'woman' by refusing these terms.³⁰ Part of the issue is also the context of sex scandals concerning male gurus.³¹ For women in public and autonomous spiritual roles such as guru, it is important that if their sexuality is represented by marriage and children, it is subordinated to their spiritual mission.³²

Authority

Female gurus perform asceticism as in part constitutive of their authority. Drawing on classical paradigms, they signify their refusal of the partiality and dedication to ego valued by worldly social codes. As guru-ascetic, Baiji says: 'The

hardest thing is not to get stuck in the egotism (*ahamkar*) of I am, I am doing, and so forth.³³

A significant pattern in female leaders' authority is the presence or absence of initiation, and by whom. There does not seem to be a correlation between caste or class and initiation or its lack. For example, both Anandamayi Ma, a brahmin, and Ammachi from the fisherman caste were self-initiated. It is clear that upper-caste women may be self-initiated—another example would be the guru Karunamayi Ma, a brahmin—and when caste or class can be known or inferred, most women who receive formal initiation from male adepts in the classical mode are of high caste or class, and the initiation is in a specific tradition. For example, Gauri Ma from the Ramakrishna tradition, Meera Ma from Aurobindo, Gurumayi from Siddha Yoga, Baiji from Arya Samaj, and Ganga Giri from the ten monastic orders started by Acharya Shankara. There are also female gurus who locate themselves within a certain lineage, such as Shree Maa who locates herself within the lineage of Sri Ramakrishna, Anandi Ma within the lineage of Sri Dhyanyogi, and Gangaji within the lineage of Ramana Maharishi.³⁴ Many female gurus also link themselves to Hindu female spiritual leaders of history, such as evoking Mirabai.³⁵

While initiation provides an important credential, linking a guru to an authoritative tradition, authority is also constituted by performance. One way to perform authority is to engage with literate tradition as a central performance. For example, the gurus Gurumayi and Karunamayi Ma offer learned though accessible discourses on Hindu philosophical concepts. The ascetic-guru Ganga Giri is admired by her followers for her extensive memorised repertoire of devotional songs, *bhajans*, and stories. Distinctively, other gurus emphasise gesture at the center. For example, Meera Ma silently sits with

her devotees. Ammachi hugs hers. The gurus who centralise literate performance tend to embody the hierarchy of teacher to audience. Those who centralise gestures may more actively challenge such a hierarchy; for example, Shree Maa and her followers collectively perform *pujas* in which there is no one center.

Gendered patterns of authority include female gurus' frequent use of 'Ma' in their titles, signifying their stance as caring, loving, and nurturing mothers to their disciples as children. Some female gurus also relate themselves to the goddess. The guru Mother Meera, Ammachi, and Karunamayi Ma are all perceived as *avatars* or embodiments of the divine. Ammachi performs ritualised enactments of her embodiment of the goddess, known as *devi bhava*, on the last day of her visit to any city; during this performance, she 'systematically and deliberately dons the garb of a goddess, in order to reveal her divinity to her followers.'³⁶

Community

Female gurus who take over the mantle in established lineages have an existing community and structure to which they can add. For example, Gauri Ma created a women's ashrama, Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama; today, the Mother's Trust or Mother's Place, also known as Ramakrishna Sarada Ashrama, Lakeshore Interfaith Institute, in Ganges, MI, USA, is an affiliated branch of Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama. Gurumayi of Siddha Yoga enhanced the major ashramas Gurudev Siddha Peeth in Ganeshpuri, India and Shree Muktananda Ashrama in New York State, and has centers all over the world.

Other gurus establish ashramas in their own right. This is in keeping with the classical model—the guru has a residence where she or he can be found and can instruct disciples. For example, Ammachi in Kerala and California,

Meera Ma in Germany, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati in Florida, Shree Maa in California, and Anandi Ma in Gujarat and California have established their own ashramas. In an intriguing inversion of the classical model, for contemporary female gurus there can be a tension between wanting to live in a solitary fashion and keeping up an ashrama, as illustrated by the guru-ascetic Baiji, who was initiated as a young woman into the Saraswati Order of the ten monastic orders formed by Shankara. She expressed longing for life at a remote ashrama in Uttarakhand, imagining it *easier* than her ongoing work to run the busy Rishi Ashrama in Haridwar.³⁷

Female gurus changed the male paradigm of guru through their emphasis on personal experience as constitutive of the spiritual path. Gurumayi, for example, consistently relates her philosophical discourses to ordinary life, and the everyday application of the teachings is promoted in ashrama workshops and in at-home courses. Ammachi's message is love, which she transmits through the gesture of individually hugging devotees.

International gurus transmit these experiences to their disciples both in person and through technology; Gangaji, Gurumayi, and Ammachi notably deploy technology, including the Internet, in transmitting their teachings.³⁸ There is an interesting dynamic between intimacy and distance in the paths of international female gurus. In terms of interaction with the guru there is an 'event intimacy' cultivated through defined moments of the guru's presence at scheduled gatherings, which often deploy technology to widen the reach; however, much of the spiritual work of the disciples is done away from the guru's embodied presence, in contrast to the traditional *gurukula* system. Yet the feeling of intimacy is profound. There are many examples of angry criticisms of gurus by ex-devotees; what

is significant is that recently, and specifically in relation to female gurus, such reflections have more the nature of a 'discourse of constructive disappointment', in which disciples reflect thoughtfully on their experiences.³⁹ Many female ascetics operate on a more local level, where they engage personal experience with their followers on a daily basis; they offer opportunities for 'everyday intimacy'. For example, Ganga Giri narrates stories of everyday encounters that illustrate themes of duty, destiny, and devotion that create a gendered 'rhetoric of renunciation'.⁴⁰ Prominent is the practice of female ascetics personally cooking for their followers, in contrast to male renunciators, who eat food cooked by others in front of an audience.⁴¹ The evocation of motherhood in caring for and nurturing the whole person in an everyday style is to the fore.


Many studies have mainly focused on the guru herself, but new studies are increasingly exploring the nature of the guru's community and provide sociological insights. For example, Amanda Lucia explores Ammachi's community in the US, analysing specific techniques of engagement by Indian-American devotees and by American devotees of other heritage.⁴² Orianne Aymard explores the continuation of the devotional community in the years since Anandamayi Ma's passing, analysing specific social and religious structures that enable its sustainability.⁴³

The performance of social service, *seva*, has a precedent in Swami Vivekananda's activities,⁴⁴ but female gurus have made it a centerpiece of their activities. Female guru-ascetics, such as Baiji, engage in charitable projects. On a larger scale, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati received numerous awards for her service to people living with HIV or AIDS; Ammachi and Gurumayi have established schools, hospitals, and prison programs. The challenge to the paradigm of other-worldliness that Maya Warrior describes for *avatara*-gurus applies as well to

female gurus who do not self-identify as avatars:

Their claim to have been incarnated on earth as avatars in order to fulfil particular divine missions serves most crucially to eliminate any tension between the ideal renouncer's other-worldly orientation and his/her engagement with the affairs of this world. As avatars incarnated in this world to fulfil particular missions, these gurus are not only justified in their engagement in worldly matters, they in fact derive their legitimacy from this engagement.⁴⁵

Spiritual growth is thus intimately linked both to personal experience in the world and public social service in the modern path of female gurus.

Judiciously adapting and challenging classical paradigms in the modern world, female gurus are important examples of a pragmatically-engaged spirituality that they embody, enact, and share with others. 

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Durga

Alok Dutta

ONCE IN A HAPPY, MERRY, FAIRY-TALE kingdom, out of somewhere came a demon and started torturing the people. He ate people alive. The citizens grew restive. They started crying for help. Every house was rent with cries of agony.

Such was the condition for a long, long time. To find a solution to this problem, people started praying to God. Then, one day, a bright handsome young prince, travelling on his bird-vehicle, came to this kingdom. He was pained at the suffering of the people there and resolved to protect them. After a valorous war, he killed the demon. The days of suffering came to an end. Having been freed from a great problem, they profusely thanked the prince.

At this juncture, somehow a beautiful princess of marriageable age comes into the story. Who could be a better bridegroom for her than this great hero who had killed the demon? All the citizens themselves arranged the wedding of the prince and the princess with great pomp. And the story came to a happy ending.

This story is quite popular and many like it. But I hate such stories. There are so many people in the kingdom—they toil on the fields in all kinds of weather, they can withstand any amount of pain. Facing floods and droughts for generations, they have become fierce warriors. Their hands that hold the plough possess no ordinary strength. The strength of the feet of women, which run the husking machine, cannot also be overlooked. There is a storehouse of limitless energy in the bodies of blacksmiths hammering on

anvils. Along with the axe of the woodcutter and the spade of the labourer, the worshippers of craft of India are deft in handling hundreds of instruments of work. The boatman and the fisherman know the battles of water. It is impossible to even conceive of the strength of all the countless people like carpenters and cobblers. Can there be any dearth of strength in a nation full of workers? Then why should the people wait for the prince?

It could be that the demon has the power of a mantra or a spell. Quite possible. But, human beings also have the mantra for great strength. That is their key to success. What is the mantra? The mantra of unity. This mantra is the united form of all men and women of all classes of society—*jana-ganesha*. All wealth of all people in society—Lakshmi. All knowledge of all people in society—Saraswati. The youth power of society, the inspiration of youth, which is capable of providing military power too—Kartikeya. The collective form of all these four strengths of the mantra of unity is Durga. Ganesha has four hands, Lakshmi has two, Saraswati has two, and Kartikeya has two—all these together become ten, the number of the hands of Mother Durga.

Durga is the collective form of all people of society and their strengths. Thus, people power, wealth, wisdom, and youth power—the synthesis of all this is Durga. It is to remind us of this that the symbolic images of these four powers find place in the altar of Mother Durga. When these powers come together in great unison and become active, great animal power becomes her slave, the poisonous snake becomes her servant.

And what to speak of demoniac power! And, the main weapon of human power—the synthesis of knowledge, wisdom, and intellect—that is the trident. By this trident the demon is slayed.

Society should protect itself in an organised manner. It need not wait for or invite a fairy-tale prince or a warrior or a supra-human saviour. Four directions, four corners, above, and below; in sum we can conclude that there are ten directions. Constantly on the vigil with ten hands each holding a weapon, is Durga's form which is ready to resist any enemy coming from any of these ten directions. We sculpt the images of Durga keeping in view her power of protecting us from any danger equally from any of these ten directions.

Durga is the symbol of the mother of society. To simplify, Durga is the symbol of the protector of society. Society is its own mother, its own child. Thus, the worship of Durga is a unique worship. At the same time, society worships mother as child and accepts worship from the child as mother. Neither this worship nor the joy of this worship has any parallel.

The trident is the synthesis of our knowledge and wisdom and is incomparable in destroying our enemies, not only the external ones, but also the internal ones, even those within our minds. What is the difference between knowledge, wisdom, and intellect? The readers may be confused about this. I attempt to delineate these differences in a simple manner.

For instance, you might know that it is possible to ride a bicycle by pedalling and steering the handle: this is knowledge. But this knowledge alone would not enable you to ride a bicycle. Till you can actually pedal and steer the handle maintaining the balance, this remains just knowledge, and does not turn into wisdom. When you would

be able to ride a bicycle properly and effectively, you would have acquired the wisdom.

You may ride the bicycle in a safe place, but that is not sufficient. You have to ride the bicycle properly and fruitfully. How to ride it depending upon the place, where to stop, how to avoid obstacles or accidents—all these require common sense, experience, and presence of mind—this is intellect.

When knowledge, wisdom, and intellect come together, they form the trident. Great deeds are accomplished by this. Our enemies are not just external demons or evildoers; we have internal enemies too. We have enemies within



society, who do evil things. For instance, when the doctor becomes the devil, when the shop-keeper becomes the adulterator, when politics becomes the nourisher of the evil and the devourer of the good, when the thief becomes the leader, when the debauched becomes a religious preacher, when the undisciplined adorns the throne of the ruler—then the mother of society has to indeed wield a trident! And it is common knowledge that unified human beings are the mother of society, Mother Durga!

PB

Finding Vedanta

Peter Kowalke

LIKE ANY GOOD ORIGIN STORY, a myth has developed about how I came to Vedanta. As the story goes, I reverse-engineered Vedanta when I was fourteen years old. I grew up in Ohio, in the woods, where there were more deer than cars. I didn't go to school, nor did I have any religious education of any kind. But when I set out to make sense of the world, I arrived at an understanding that looked remarkably like Vedanta. Only later did I discover it had a name, and that there were others who believed as I did.

The actual story of how I came to Vedanta is more nuanced and a lot less magical. I did live in the woods and I did come to Vedanta without knowing it by name, but the principles of Vedanta were quietly seeded throughout my life from the very beginning. Like someone reconstructing a puzzle, all I did was identify the pieces and put them back together. Assembling the puzzle was a long task. It took twenty-nine years. I was given the first piece almost immediately, however, at age two. It came in the form of a curious statement by my mother.

Mother's Love

By all accounts I was a sweet child, physically energetic but also sensitive and able to quietly occupy myself for long stretches at a time. I was not mischievous, and definitely not cruel. I listened to my mother, and I felt bad when I made a mistake. But mistakes happen, and when I was two years old I made my mother mad. I think I broke a bowl.

My mother, usually so calm and understanding, had a rare lapse in temper when I broke this particular bowl. She scolded me, and I cried. But then she did something I will never forget.

Seeing my tears, my mother paused and questioned herself. Why would she make someone she loved so deeply feel bad and cry? For what, a bowl? I was so much more important than this bowl, and yet here she was causing me distress over its loss.

Determined to fix her mistake, my mother sat me down, looked me in the eye, and very seriously said she might lose her temper, she might say hurtful words. She might even momentarily forget her love for me. But no matter what I did, no matter what I said, she would always love me.

I must never forget this truth, my mother told me that day. And by the seriousness of her tone, I knew I would never forget the lesson. My mother would always love me.

This was the most important moment of my life, a foundational truth, and it happened at age two. It made me question the nature of love, and that in turn ultimately led me to Vedanta.

For if my mother's love was not conditional, what was the basis of love? If something could be permanent and everlasting, what was permanent and what was not?

I knew that bowls would break and people would die. If my mother's love for me would not die, something I knew both from words and direct experience, it had to be permanent; love had to be something fixed and unchanging that would survive my poor actions and my human

frailty. Everything I saw was impermanent, but there had to be a permanent foundation underneath or there could not be everlasting love.

Through this simple statement, 'I love you and I always will', I also arrived at the understanding that this permanence is shared and within all of us. Real love could not be about beauty, action, or even thought, because these things were impermanent. Real love could only come from loving the permanent part of a person, or what I later would understand to be the soul in Christianity or the Atman in Vedanta. Like the traditional Indian greeting, *namaste*, real love was the divinity within me recognising the divinity within the other person. It was seeing self.

The myth of how I came to Vedanta might suggest that the little two-year-old Peter understood this lesson in a flash of insight. But I did not. I never forgot the moment, and I never questioned my mother's unconditional love. But it took years for me to fully unpack the significance of my mother's statement.

I didn't fully understand the lesson until I was fourteen and searching for truth.

Truth is One, but Sages Call it Variouslly

Like many youth, I began searching for answers as I came of age. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? How do I deal with death?

Unlike many youth, I was left to find the answers myself because I did not attend school. There were no teachers to give me the answers, and my parents were moral but not religious. So I began making sense of the world with a relatively open mind and little overt direction.

What I found were several large groups that each claimed they alone had the truth. They were right, and everyone else was wrong.

The problem with this situation was that each group made the same claim. The Christians said

they were right, the Muslims countered with their own God, and the Buddhists thought that both groups missed the point because there was no higher power. Science added that all faith was misguided, and only the theories of physics and evolution made sense.

Approaching the problem rationally and without much bias, my fourteen-year-old self tried to make sense of this mess.

Each group had some seriously silly people among its ranks, but each group also had many intelligent advocates. I could not easily dismiss any group, nor choose among them; it would be a tremendous act of hubris to think I knew more than the smart people in each camp who had dedicated their lives to answering these eternal questions.

My approach, therefore, was a search for commonality. While I could not choose among competing claims, I could see if there were any universal principles that all major belief systems had in common. These common universal principles would be my best chance at knowing the truth.

I found many commonalities as I pieced my way through the various faiths and facts in my early teen years. One universal concept stood out, however, one that was particularly strong in my Judeo-Christian culture and also in my personal history: love. All major belief systems had love at the center.

From this commonality and my early childhood experience with real love, I pulled together the teachings of every major knowledge tradition I could find and developed a pet theory that God is love, that he must by definition be permanent and unchanging, and that the fundamental building block of everything, from my computer to myself, was this oneness called God.

In my search, I had come upon an unnamed and slightly unrefined iteration of Advaita Vedanta.

The myth of how I came to this truth would have me reaching it on my own, in the woods, when I was fourteen. Really I had been quietly exposed to these ideas for years, however; the ideas of Vedanta were unnamed but all around me growing up.

On a cultural level, my family and friends did not know that Swami Vivekananda had come to Chicago for the Parliament of Religions in 1893, but his lecture tour deeply impacted US intellectual thought. The educational theorists who informed my parent's decision to keep me out of school might not have been tuned into Vedanta, but the counterculture that influenced their thinking was built on it.

More directly, my mother internalised some of the ideas of the American transcendentalists as an English teacher, but she didn't realise these very American thinkers were deeply moved by the Upanishads. Likewise, I devoured self-improvement books as a youth, but rarely if ever did these life transformation gurus acknowledge that their ideas were watered-down Vedanta thought.

In retrospect, there were many such examples. I had been swimming in a sea of Vedanta without knowing it. What I did was trace the concepts back to their foundation in my search for life's answers.

I remember feeling like a genius when I first 'invented' Vedanta. This understanding could be lived and experienced, not just believed. It relied on ancient wisdom that resonated with the human experience, but it also lived comfortably with modern science and every major religion I knew. It was so profound, this understanding I formulated, that I even briefly wondered if I was the second coming of Christ.

Mostly I was not that sure of myself, however.

I knew nobody who believed like me, and I was keenly aware that truth cannot be invented.

If I was the only one who understood these truths, chances were high that I had gotten something wrong.

So mostly I kept quiet while I practised and deepened my spiritual understanding.

Experiments in Truth

Because Vedanta is first and foremost tied to my direct experience in love, an experience that began at birth, for me it has never been based on faith or received wisdom. Vedanta is something to be lived and found in every moment. The Advaita Vedanta framework explains this experience and anticipates my future direction. But it only ever is a guide, a logical explanation that follows the direct experience.

Literally in the woods, figuratively all alone in my understanding of the world, I began experimenting as I quietly searched for others who understood what I saw and felt.

These experiments in truth took a multitude of forms, but they were principally centered around the concept of 'thou art that'. Almost always, they were about breaking down the distinction between me and the other. At first I would find myself in the other, then I would subvert my ego by losing myself in this expanded Self.

One early experiment was an attack on preferences.

Preferences build our sense of self at the cost of identifying with the other; they define and limit us. So if somebody liked a food or an experience, I told myself that I should be able to like it, too, if I discovered why they enjoyed it. There were only things I liked and things I was going to like, I speculated. For the most part that assumption has held true and shown the hollowness of categorising things into good and bad.

Another big experiment was testing the idea that our individuality is just maya, an illusion,

and that we really are One on a deeper level. I tested this hypothesis by seeing if I could find myself in anyone, a challenge to love everyone.

At first this assumption of love and identification only worked with young and attractive girls. But I kept at the experiment, and eventually I learned how to love with equal speed and intensity the tired grocery store clerk and the old man smoking on the street. This identification with all people led to experiments in enlarged decision-making and personal austerity for the benefit of others, among other tests.

Then there were the experiments that flowed naturally from my increasingly Vedantic outlook, many of which I did not even notice or understand at first.

I ran a small national magazine as a teenager, and I would stay up late and labour over every hyphen and comma. Yet when an issue would roll off the press and an error was found, I would usually shrug off the mistake. I worked tirelessly so each issue was perfect, but afterwards I promptly gave up the fruit of my labour as if the perfectionism was just a game.

Only later would the Bhagavadgita and other texts explain this behaviour as non-attachment.

Om Sri Ramakrishnaya Namah

By age eighteen there was no longer the need for a fence around my faith because nothing could dissuade me from what I knew through direct experience. Or so the story goes.

While a compelling myth in my Vedanta origin story, in fact I was deeply torn between what I knew and what others told me I should know. Still lacking any sense of community or guidance, I didn't trust myself, but I also could not turn away from my understanding of truth and the personal experience that brought me there.

I embraced spiritual guidance wherever I could find it, and that often came through

Christian denominations, mystical writings, quantum physics, and literature on comparative religion. I knew I could use the teachings of any major spiritual tradition, but tweaking the lower truths I encountered and working in isolation was tiring. It also slowed my progress.

But then I found Acharya Shankara.

In my second year of college, I ran across the great Advaita philosopher, Shankara, in a textbook on comparative religion. This discovery was huge, because it finally gave me a lineage and a place to look for guidance. My seemingly eccentric world view had a name, and there were others who saw this truth.

Yet I knew none of these people. Running across Acharya Shankara was an incomparable relief because it put to rest my concerns that I was a cult leader in the making who had invented a religion. But I knew nobody who had heard of him, and the few Indians I approached at the time either laughed at me and shoved a *pakora* in my face, or they talked dualistically of many-armed gods and personal shrine rooms. I knew from the Acharya Shankara discovery that I must be Hindu, but all the Hinduism I could find was similar to the lower truth I had found years before.

A big part of the problem was that I still didn't know where to look, and at the time there was no Internet to give me direction. I called myself Hindu when I really should have searched for Vedanta; I stumbled upon the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda but couldn't distinguish them among the sea of self-aggrandising gurus.

I was close, but not quite home.

The discovery of Acharya Shankara was a turning point inasmuch as I now had confidence and a lead on where to look for guidance: India. Yet I still was alone, and I still had deep reservations that I misunderstood Vedanta because I

was not Indian and I had not yet met anyone who actually thought like I did.

For many years this was the situation. Thirteen, to be exact. I experimented, I searched for guidance, I called myself Hindu when pressed. But nobody understood what I meant until I walked into my first Ramakrishna Mission temple in early 2010.

By that time I was a magazine editor in the suburbs of New York and ready for a bold move.

I had been a part of the Chinmaya Mission in Michigan, and I had visited India several times by then. I knew my truths were in the Gita and the Upanishads, and I already had an origin story I told people about my lifelong spiritual journey. But at the same time, I was spiritually stuck because I had gone as deep as I could go without guidance or a spiritual community. Vedanta was a hobby, and I knew it needed to be my life. So I left my job and moved from the New York suburbs to the city with the hope of finding community and guidance.

It didn't take long.

In the one element of my magical Vedanta origin story that actually mirrors reality, I stepped into the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York on my third day in the city and knew immediately that my search was over.

The presiding monk, a former *Prabuddha Bharata* editor, Swami Yuktatmananda, calmly and self-effacingly gave a lecture that day which perfectly coincided with my secret life philosophy for the past three decades. He mentioned Acharya Shankara. He explained love in terms of the Atman and motherhood. He even talked about how all religions lead to the same ultimate truth.

For the first time, I listened to a spiritual talk that required no translation or qualification. I was home, and I knew it immediately.

It is tempting to speculate that I might have

been an Indian in a former life, and that my spiritual journey has extended for several lifetimes. This might be true, and it definitely would make a good story.

The truth probably is more humble, however.

The time-tested ideas of Vedanta have always made an impact on thoughtful people, and Vedanta has directly influenced American thinking since Swami Vivekananda planted the seeds more than a hundred years ago. Vedanta is sprinkled throughout American culture, rarely named but deeply embedded.

Through circumstance and the freedom to follow truth where it leads, I simply came upon this obscure but influential strain of thought at an early age. I stuck with it because Vedanta coherently explained the deepest depths of my direct experience, and I make it the centre of my life even today because there's no point in following a lower truth when a higher one exists.

None of this is magical or special. But it can make for a good story, especially among people who sometimes raise me up because I am young, white, and talk intelligently about some of our deepest truths.

What is lost in the magical myth version of how I came to Vedanta is not only that my journey is far from complete, but also that we all can make the journey.

We like to elevate spiritual people and ascribe their lives to karma and natural gift. This may be true. But when we elevate people and start to quietly build myths around them, we also disempower ourselves. These people become special, their experience becomes that which cannot be lived.

When I walk in the village of Kamarpukur north of Kolkata, where Sri Ramakrishna was born, I don't like to think of him as a spiritual giant beyond reach. I like to think of him as a man just like me.



The Power and Mystery of Prayer and Meditation

Dan A Chekki

WHAT IS PRAYER? Why do we pray and what do we pray for? Why is prayer necessary? What are the benefits of prayer? How does it change us? What is the place of prayer and meditation in human life and the universe? I shall attempt to answer some of these questions.

Prayer is a process of communication between human and divine spheres. Prayer is a spontaneous emotional outpouring of the heart. We pray to God for health, happiness, and prosperity as well as appeal to God to bless and protect us in times of sickness, and during other kinds of crises in life. While praying one may sit, stand, kneel, fall prostrate, chant, sing and dance or remain silent, read sacred scriptures, or worship idols by offering water, food, flowers and fruits, and so on. Prayer and meditation form an important element in every religion and culture.

Every significant action begins with prayer. As a matter of fact, all sacred scriptures, art, architecture, drama, dance, and music originally started as prayer. Ritual prayer is characteristic of Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and so forth. Devotional prayer is regular and routine repetition at set intervals during the day or week. For instance, Hindus meditate on the Om and/or on their favourite deity such as Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, and Krishna. For Mahatma Gandhi, prayer is the very soul and essence of religion and the core of human life.

Prayer usually consists of poems in praise of

God describing His absolute power, generosity and compassion, together with an appeal: 'Help me Oh God! Forgive me Oh Lord!' Prayer and meditation may also be directed at achieving the goal of spiritual enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of births which is often the case with saints and mystics. Prayer opens up the kingdom of God within us. It is an attempt to be connected to God and be in the presence of God.

Many people believe that prayer has great power. It motivates the inner life of individuals and the collective life of human cultures. The very effort involved in prayer tends to calm and soothe our mind and heart. The impulse to ask for divine assistance seems to be an integral part of being human. The person who prays oscillates between two worlds: a divine world of stillness and silence, and a human world of sound and movement. The devotee surrenders oneself to God, and God is expected to respond to a request or series of requests with blessings conferring material wealth, health and happiness, and freedom from the miseries of life.

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Prayer is often considered a religious practice; it could be individual or communal, and it may take place in private or public communication, in the form of hymn or incantation with a deity. There are different forms of prayer: petitionary, supplication, thanksgiving, guidance, praise,

requesting assistance, confessing sins, or expressing one's thoughts and emotions. A typology of prayer includes: primitive, ritual, Greek cultural, philosophical, mystical, and prophetic. There are different prayers for specific occasions such as blessing a meal, at birth or death, at significant events, or on holy days.¹ The ultimate goal of prayer is to help train a person to focus on divinity through contemplation.

Christianity follows the Book of Common Prayer, Book of Psalms, and the Lord's Prayer. Muslims pray a ritualistic prayer facing Mecca five times a day following the Quran. In Buddhism, prayer accompanies meditation. In Hinduism, ritual invocation was an integral part of the Vedic religion extolling a single supreme force, Brahman. The Vedic ritual based on a fire sacrifice, personified as the god Agni, necessitated a highly specialised priesthood. Great significance was attached to the chanting of hymns and invocations by the priesthood. The spiritualisation of prayer and its relation to the gods and the universe through ritual practice constitute the early phase of religious thought in India. An essential feature of Vedic rituals, the prayer itself was given cosmological implications, and later became the subject of philosophical inquiry. For the majority of Hindus, recitation of prayers along with worship of gods, pilgrimages, almsgiving, and other charitable works and good behaviour are supposed to create religious merit, which allows one to reach heaven and attain a good rebirth.

Meditation has been practised since antiquity as a component of various religious traditions and beliefs. It is a practice in which an individual trains the mind or induces a mode of consciousness, either to realise some benefit or as an end in itself. Meditation may be designed to build internal energy or life force, to develop sustained single-pointed concentration, compassion, love,

patience, generosity; and to promote a sense of well-being and relaxation. Meditation has been used as an internal effort to self-regulate the mind in some way in various religious traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, and Judaism, Kabbalah. In Hinduism, earliest references to meditation are found in the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavadgita.

Meditation is a way to realise union of one's self, the Atman, with the omnipresent Brahman. Patanjali's yoga practice includes ethical discipline, physical posture, breath control, withdrawal from the senses, one-pointedness of mind, meditation, and the realisation of the identity of one's self and the supreme Being. Meditation has been used in non-religious contexts in North America and Europe in counselling and psychotherapy for a variety of purposes. There has been a proliferation of yoga schools in the Western world aimed at physical fitness, reduction of stress, relaxation, and peace of mind. The effects of meditation have been measured by using modern scientific techniques and instruments such as fMRI and EEG in neurological research to verify what happens in the body when one meditates, and how bodies and brains change after regular meditation. Brain activity during meditation indicates that people who frequently practise meditation experience lower blood pressure, plus decreased anxiety and depression.

The family provides a small group social milieu for prayer and meditation. Prayers are recited at the beginning of each meal in the traditional home. We are reminded of the maxim that 'the family that prays together stays together'. However, in contemporary urban communities, it seems that members of most families find it difficult to pray together.

Several saints and mystics of the Shaiva, Nayanmars of the Tamil region, and the Virashaiva tradition, Basava, Mahadeviakka of the Kannada

region,² and saints from other regions of India such as Chaitanya, Mirabai, Tukaram, Guru Nanak, Kabir, and Sri Ramakrishna, just to name a few, have experienced the ecstasy of prayer. Likewise, many Christian, Jewish, and Sufi saints and mystics were engaged in prayers and meditation of ecstasy. The forms and methods of meditation, dhyana, and deep meditation, yoga, are presented in the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali and in the Gita.

III

The prayer to overcome illness is a communion with God, and a communion between self and society and the transcendent. Healing prayer is a valuable gift suggesting that God and humans are one. Even great mystics such as Sri Ramakrishna of Bengal³ and Ramana Maharishi in South India⁴ experienced, in the midst of their union with the divine, the mystery of God's awful and wonderful power through prayer. For Rabindranath Tagore, poet and Nobel laureate, the sole purpose of art is prayer. His *Gitanjali* is a book of prayers where poetry and spirituality merge.

Swami Vivekananda maintained that yoga enables us to carry into practice the teachings of morality. While Swami Vivekananda accepted prayer and meditation as an essential part of spiritual discipline, he stressed that an equally important aspect of worship lies in the service of humanity for the emancipation of the poor and the downtrodden masses, relief operations during times of crisis, rural reconstruction, and so forth.⁵ He brought into being a form of spiritual discipline in which the major—karma, bhakti, jnana, and raja—types of yogas are integrated into spiritual endeavour and social service.

The contemplative prayer contains different forms of prayer: the prayer of quiet, the prayer of union, the prayer of spiritual love, and so on. The contemplative prayer is not an event in life but a way of life; it is a path towards self-knowledge,

and towards salvation and union with God. On the other hand, collective or group prayers are sociological in nature. Such prayers redeem people from social isolation. A person goes to a temple, church, mosque, or synagogue and recites devotional prayers which put us in touch with other people and with God.

IV

Religion, spirituality, prayer, and meditation are intertwined. The reputed French sociologist Émile Durkheim observed that the exuberance of religious imagery and activity associated with rites and rituals such as prayer is a form of collective symbolic representation of values and ideals in social life. The function of prayer is to strengthen social bonds raising the social vitality necessary for the well working of our moral life. Durkheim perceived prayer as the divinisation of the community composed of a set of beliefs, sentiments, and practices.⁶ The common form of prayer is to appeal to God to grant one's request. This is the social approach to prayer.

Along with anthropologists such as Edward Tylor and James Frazer, the eminent German sociologist Max Weber thought that the characteristic elements of divine worship, prayer, and sacrifice have their origin in magic. He noted that, in prayer, the boundary between magical formula and supplication remains fluid. In most cases, individual prayer has a purely business-like, rationalised form that sets forth the achievements of the supplicant on behalf of the god and then claims adequate recompense therefor. Furthermore, people tend to attribute human behaviour patterns to gods and think that God's favour can be obtained by prayer, gifts, service, tributes, cajolery, and bribes. On the other hand, God's favour may be earned as a consequence of the devotee's own faithfulness and good conduct in conformity with the divine will.

According to Weber, all prayers, even in the most other-worldly religions, are the aversion of the external evils of this world and the inducement of the external advantages of this world. Prayer groups are formed among different religions, and congregations are held weekly to summon divine or supernatural intervention for community well-being and to avert disasters and crises.

Weber points out that salvation is sought, not from prayer alone, but also from the wheel of karma causality. Rewards and punishments for every good and evil deed are automatically established by the karma causality of the cosmic mechanism of compensation.⁷ The relationships of humans to supernatural forces take the form of prayer. The gods to whom one turns for protection are regarded as subject to some social and moral order. And the belief in fate or destiny provides one explanation for the failure of so many prayers.

British anthropologist Raymond Firth argues that it is not possible for human society to exist without some form of symbolic solutions which rest on non-empirical foundations. Religion embodies a conceptualisation and projection of the most fundamental human needs and problems. A solution to human problems, the act of prayer, provides tension-release through verbal and other physical action. When reason fails, then the supra-rational is called to aid. Prayer, worship, revelation, miracle, or other supra-normal process is claimed.⁸

V

There are some who argue against the need for prayer. Doesn't God already know our pressing needs and problems? Wouldn't God, who is loving, generous, and compassionate, provide whatever we truly require? Isn't imploring through prayer a form of sanctified nagging?

We approach God with a lengthy wish list of demands and think that we can manipulate or bribe God with promises of prayer, charity, and gifts to avert illness or misfortune. If prayer is aimed at changing God's mind, God is eternally unchanging. The thing that you ask for is either good or bad. If it is good, God will provide it anyway. If it is bad, he won't. In neither case can your prayer make any difference.

The question often raised in this context happens to be: why some prayers are answered with positive response by God while others are ignored. Several explanations are given: a) positive or negative response to prayer depends on one's intensity of faith and confidence in God, and the sincerity and depth of devotion toward God; b) you didn't deserve it; c) result of past deeds; d) God knows what is best for you better than you do; e) God is indifferent to human joys and sorrows; f) perhaps there is no God, and so on. The mystery of prayer remains.

Instead of appeals and demands, if people pray to God and express their gratitude for what they have rather than what they don't, and pray for strength, courage, and patience to bear the unbearable, their prayers may be answered. If God doesn't answer our prayer, satisfy our needs, or solve our complex problems, then some may think who needs God or what is wrong with us or with God? This is a riddle beyond reason when God seems to bless and reward others less deserving than us. These persons may feel that God has let us down when we need him most leading to feelings of guilt, anger, or hopelessness.

It is said that the ideal prayer, or a more enlightened way of praying, is one that is selfless and that does not ask for material gains or health and happiness. Instead, it should focus upon the self-realisation of God within and that which is altruistic. St Francis of Assisi advised that, when we pray to God, we must be seeking nothing.

VI

However, a strong argument is advanced in favour of prayer. It is prayer and meditation that leads a person towards God; it may cure an illness or make us more capable for receiving divine blessings and gifts. According to the German philosopher Kant, the purpose of prayer can be to induce in us a moral disposition, not seeking the satisfaction of our wants. We obtain through prayer those things that God wishes to grant us if and only if we pray. God wishes us to pray in order to gain faith and confidence in God, and acknowledge him as the source of all our blessings. It may be that God does not know everything or is too busy with too many responsibilities, so he needs to be informed and reminded of our desires through prayer. In any event, it is good to pray to God to bestow strength and courage in order to endure and face the miseries and severe challenges that we encounter.

It may be that prayer operates within an economy of reciprocal social exchange that one must give through suffering and sacrifice, love and devotion, or prayer in order to receive God's blessings. The priest, on behalf of devotees, worships God and offers sacrifice in exchange for healing, health, happiness, and prosperity. Prayer soothes grief and enhances our spiritual energy.

VII

What are the benefits of prayer? What does prayer accomplish? There is an impressive list of benefits: physical well-being, a happy family, a well-organised peaceful society, a good harvest, and so on. The very act of praying is said to have a transforming effect delighting the joyful and comforting the afflicted. It is difficult to scientifically investigate the claims made for the power and influence of prayer and meditation. However, there are well-documented episodes


of illness overcome by prayer. For instance, the *American Journal of Public Health* and the *American Journal of Psychiatry* have published reports by medical researchers which conclude that prayer or meditation help fight disease. Family physicians consider prayer and related religious practices to be effective in promoting health resulting in fewer heart attacks, lower blood pressure, stronger immune systems, and longer, happier, and healthier lives.

Prayer and meditation constitute spiritual energy. Dr Siegel and Dr Larry Dossey have observed in their medical practice that distant healing through prayer had a therapeutic effect on health.⁹ Patients who had received distant healing intentions, love, and prayers from friends, relatives, and others had undergone significantly less severe illnesses, required fewer doctor visits, fewer days of hospitalisation, and significantly improved mood compared with patients who did not receive distant prayers. These findings are based on a double blind study of the impact of distant healing at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco. This suggests that prayer is infinite, universal, and cosmic. Dozens of patients who had recovered from serious illness emphasised the importance of prayer and meditation as significant to their recovery. There is an extensive body of scientific data supporting distant healing. Many medical schools in the United States offer courses dealing with the role of devotion and prayer in healing.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* published an article titled 'Should physicians prescribe prayer for health?'¹⁰ A vast body of clinical and experimental cases demonstrates that spiritual practices elicit positive changes in respiration and heart rate, produces changes in brain wave patterns, and so forth. It should be noted, however, that prayer is not a magic bullet against disease. Prayer combined with medical

treatment and lifestyle changes may show positive results.

Prayer accomplishes a couple of things even if we don't get what we pray for. First, we gain the knowledge that we are not alone. God is with us in our experiences of joys and sorrows. Second, prayer is a means of coming to terms with our own limitations. Since we can't control everything in life by our own efforts, we tend to believe that our good deeds will be rewarded. Wayne Dyer, a noted author, writes: 'The daily practice of meditation is the single thing in my life that gives me a greater sense of well-being, increased energy, higher productivity at a more conscious level, more satisfying relationships and a closer connection to God.'¹¹

Prayer as a spiritual energy seems to be astonishingly powerful. It is mysterious in its consequences and remains enigmatic to fathom. Nevertheless, it does empower us, gives hope, comfort, and solace to our soul in normal and in critical moments of life. Prayer appears to have a therapeutic effect on our body and mind. Prayer and meditation transcend religion, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, and tend to have universal appeal. 

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3. See *Thus Spake Sri Ramakrishna* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 24–44. This section deals with 'How to Realize God?' He says: 'Repeat God's name and sing his glories, and keep holy company' (24). Also see *Thus Spake the Holy Mother* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2001), 41–6. This section presents a discourse on spiritual practice: 'Always try to do the Lord's work and at the same time try to practice Japa and meditation.' (42–3).
4. Sri Ramana Maharishi's life, philosophy, religion, and spirituality are depicted in *Saints and Mystics* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 2005), 190–212. Also see Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Dutton, 1911), 366.
5. See Swami Tapasyananda, *Swami Vivekananda: His Life and Legacy* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 2003), 160–75 and Swami Vivekananda, *Universal Ethics and Moral Conduct* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 71–81, 89–101. Also see *Thus Spake Vivekananda* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002): 'He who sees Siva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Siva' (77). 'They alone live who live for others; the rest are more dead than alive' (80).
6. See Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work—A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Penguin, 1973), 242, 471, 475.
7. See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 25–6, 266.
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The Diseases of Modern Life and the Ayurvedic Approach

Bhaswati Bhattacharya

(Continued from the previous issue)

Food

THE FOOD WE EAT and the diet we plan are essential therapeutic tools in Ayurveda. We have three opportunities each day to medicate ourselves: they are breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We also have three opportunities each day to poison ourselves: they are breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Examine not only what you eat, but from where the food is obtained, how it was processed, how much time has elapsed since it was alive. Do not eat old food. Notice how fast you eat, where you eat, when you eat, what your cravings and appetite are, and whether you pay attention to the diversity of nutrients you intake, not just the calories. Spend conscious time observing, appreciating, and visually and mentally digesting what you will put into your mouth, connecting it with the universe before connecting to your body.

Ayurveda emphasises the need for all six tastes in every meal in order to evoke all the necessary digestive enzymes and fires needed for proper nourishment: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. It tells us to eat only to fill one-third of the stomach. It tells us to eat clean, fresh food.

We need to avoid bad food combinations, known as *viruddha*, such as fruit with milk, or fish with milk, or many fruits together, or yogurt with fruit. Different enzymes are required

by the stomach and the small intestine to properly digest and absorb them, and these *viruddha* combinations are thought to disturb the fires of the belly.

Get into the kitchen! Spend time learning how to cut vegetables, use fire, and prepare foods. Think good thoughts and pray when you cook, as the energy from your mind travels through your hands and those of your fellow cooks into the food you prepare. When you involve yourself in the cooking, you learn to be more coordinated, more graceful, and more skilled. Goddess Lakshmi is said to visit the home of those with clean, well-set kitchens, as the birth of food is the beginning of the grounding and wealth that we give our physical body.

Set up a kitchen pharmacy, with a live aloe plant, a live tulasi plant, a glass container of turmeric, several types of salt, a bottle of pure ghee, and glass containers of digestive spices such as cumin or *jeera*, coriander or *dhaniya*, carom seeds or *ajvain*, fennel or *saunf*, cinnamon or *dalchini*, cardamom or *elaichi*, and dried neem leaves.

Exercise

Daily walking in Nature is a great way to lower our excess Pitta, and its fiery, goal-obsessed tendencies of a modern lifestyle. Nature's harmony seeps into our being when we take time to be among trees, earth, water, grass, and the flows and sounds of Nature.

Exercise that involves the mind and gives it responsibility over the body is better than passive movements of the muscles done by someone else in physical therapy or mindless gymnasium work.

Learn your limits of exercise, both the minimum and the maximum. Too little exercise stagnates the body, the circulation, the mind. Too much exercise or too severe discipline aggravates the amount of softness needed to keep the mind and body united.

Exercise is to challenge the body to its healthy fullest. Each person's capacity is different and should be used regularly in order to keep it usable. Use it or lose it.

Find a way to learn some yoga. Yoking of the mind to the body is the ultimate power, more than guns or words. Learn how to use *pranayama*, *asanas*, *dhyana* for strengthening one's being and cultivating inner power.

Sleep

Spend time away from work and stressful

interactions in the hours before sleep. Use the time for bonding, good relationships, enjoyment, and appreciation. Bring inner light into your environment after sunset. The Ayurvedic prescriptions for a healthy night routine involve a fruitful end of the day and preparations for the night ahead, including meals, relationships, preparation for the next day, and sleep.

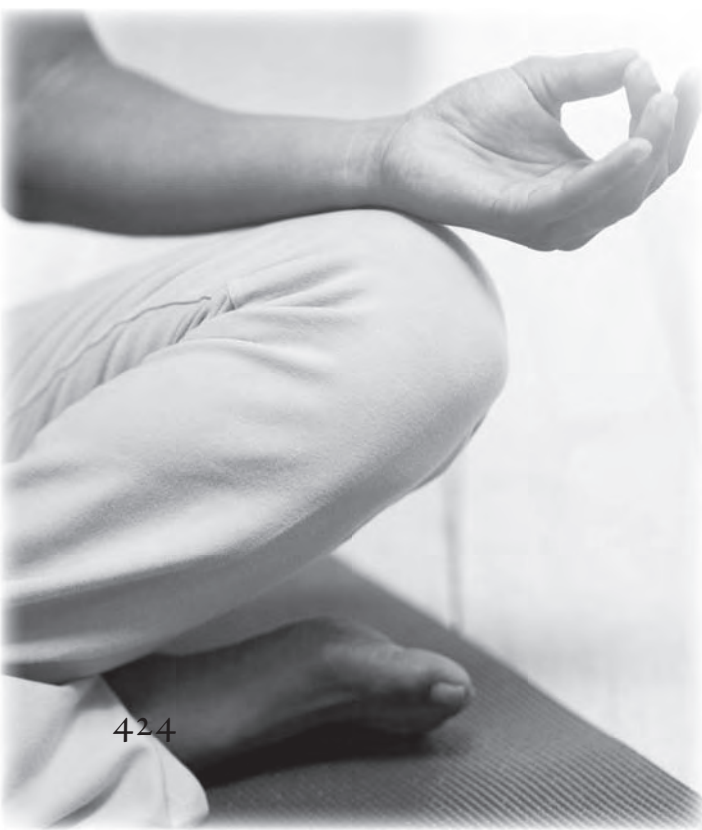
Each person needs a different amount of sleep. That amount differs slightly based on how the day's events stressed the body. Emotional traumas, violence, and anger require more time in sleep. People with heavier bodies, or with toxins in their bodies, need more time in sleep.

Never sleep with the crown of the head facing north. The alignment of the chakras has its own flow and should not be in alignment with the magnetic field of the earth. When you sleep with the head facing north, your body cannot find its own true north. Educate yourself on some laws of Vastu, and move your house interiors to optimise the energy in your space. Health often changes for people as they observe the laws of Vastu.

Sleep in a clean, well-darkened room if possible. The pineal gland in the brain generates clock-like hormones and regulates the chronobiology of your system based on clear ideas of night and dark. Sleep is the restful practice of rest and requires conscious preparations to block out all unnecessary sensory disturbances while you sleep.

Wash your feet, your hands, your face, and your mouth before sleep. Rid yourself of the dirt and grime of the day before entering into the sacred abode of sleep. That dirt and grime will feed unhealthy bacteria on your microbiome as you sleep so it is better not to encourage them.

Go to bed early. Get up at *brahma muhurta*, forty-five to ninety minutes before dawn. This will regulate your brain's hormone centers and



cure many metabolic lifestyle diseases if you rise early consistently. To do this, you have to plan to get the household to bed early. Set rules for no TV, no computer after 10 p.m.

Daily Routine

The early morning routine after rising should involve examination of the body's rhythms and cleansing of the channels and senses that take in the world. Wake early. Lie in bed and observe how your gut is feeling. Pray to the ground before touching the motherland, and walking on it all day. Empty bowels and bladders. Wash hands. Wash face. Rinse eyes with cool water. Rinse nose with cool water. Rinse mouth with cool water. Brush teeth. Scrape tongue. Rinse mouth. See yourself. See an auspicious object. Hear an auspicious sound. Smell a sweet smell. Taste a sweet glass of clean, pure water. Then start the day.

The basic principles of hygiene and good conduct in society are the foundations of modern public health. In Ayurveda, these principles include self-care, elimination of wastes, and conduct that does not put others at risk of getting injured or sick.

Set up your home to be prone to Ayurvedic recommendations. Keep a copper jug for storing water and keeping it naturally cool. Have the altar space accessible for prayer and worship. Create storage in the kitchen for easy, clean food preparation. Keep the bathroom clean and free from stagnant water. Invest in good plumbing and good storage areas.

Work

Love the work you do, if you cannot choose to do the work you love. Understand that some connection lies between you and your job for a purpose. That is why you have your job and someone else does not. Once you do your best at your job,

things shift. A hard workplace means you are not learning some lesson that you need to learn. Do not be lazy at work. Just this one rule will change your life and mind's contentment.

Shift your relationship with money. Make a budget to learn what you actually spend. Save ten per cent of what you earn. Spend ten per cent of what you earn on things you love. Use the other eighty per cent judiciously. Clean your financial papers and keep them tidy. A clean wallet and clean financial actions translate to clean energy in the mind and body and often affect health.

Be impeccable with your word. When you say anything to anyone, keep the commitment. Renegotiate if you will be late or unable. Do not keep people waiting. Say nothing if you cannot say good things honestly: remember that non-violence comes before truthfulness. Do not gossip about others. Do not say bad things about yourself or your family, even if you feel compelled. These principles of self-control and positive mental rightfulness according to one's conscience are known in Ayurveda as *Sadvritta*.

Time

The three main causes for the development of imbalance, and then pathology, drive the study of Ayurveda. They are *prajnya-aparadha*, or disrespect against the inner knower of true wisdom; *indriya-asatmya*, the misuse, overuse, and underuse of the senses; and *parinama*, the changes and challenges of time. Slavery to time is both a tool for discipline, but also a tool for slavery. We must free ourselves regularly from time-bound activities, deadlines, and goal-oriented activities. Time will keep moving forward, and take our minds with it. But if we remind ourselves of our true nature of being timeless, we will not fall prey to the thoughts and worries that time will ensnackle.

One evening every week, do not use any electronic equipment, look at a watch, or have a fixed alarm. Go to bed early. Spend the evening freely and surrender to the sun, which will arise the next morning and pull you in its wake. For a night, be free. Ayurveda has therapeutic practices, where patients are kept free from clocks, even sequestered from the sun in *kuti-praveshika* or prescriptive lightless hut-living, in order to move them into the space of timelessness for healing quickly.

Relationships

Materialism is a ploy to anchor us to society. The real lessons and values of life are in relationships. Treasure and maintain ten to twelve people in your life with grace and care, and treat the others well but with less openness and intimacy.

Make your relationship with your inner self the main relationship of your life. Be more conscious of what your gut is telling you. Ayurveda tells us that the vast majority of our diseases begin in our mind and in our gut. When you feel confused, weak, angry, or afraid, drop that thought down into the heart, radiate from the heart down to the belly, and feel where in the belly the feeling goes. Feel your feelings. Do not ignore them. Process them. That will mature you.

Use your material things to maintain good relationships with people. Do not use relationships with people to maintain material things. Spend your money on experiences of enrichment and for helping others.

Taking Care of the Body

Listen to your body but do not blindly act on whatever it urges you to do. When your body starts driving you to do what it wants, step back and see that your body is trying to make you a slave. Strengthen the mind and shift the energy of the sexual urge to an energy focused on

the second chakra, the *svadhishtana*, the center of creativity. Work on a creative project, as the urge is actually calling you to renew your relationship with creativity. Use music, art, and dance to sublimate your sexual drives into a positive expression.

Keep your face at its best. Not only is it the region for four of your senses; light reflecting from it is what will likely greet people when they first see you. Much of healthy attraction occurs when others can see you clearly. Clean the skin gently, using upward strokes. Clean it in the morning and when you enter from outdoors. Sleep on clean pillow covers and do not put the same pillow on your feet or legs that your face touches. Keep artificial face products off the face. Do face yoga, postures that exercise the many muscles of the face, to keep the tissues toned. Do not squint.

Medical Care

Get educated. Learn more about your body. There are books, and good readings on the Internet, but the best teachers are healthy, wise, old people who are retired doctors or midwives. Their lives are the proof of how to live strong and long.

Make your physician learn more. Show your doctor what works for you. Your herbs and foods are just as important medicines as any tablets, and your physician should open her or his mind about the many ways of healing the body. Pay your doctor only when she or he gives you what you need. This is difficult, but it is a necessary feedback to shift their behaviour when doctors abuse their privileges. A little activism by you will shift the thinking of people around you who are claiming to care for your health.

Be aware that most people who are selling you health products are not able to give you accurate, pure truth, as their job is to bias you into purchasing their service or product. Do not

watch commercials on television about health products. Ask your doctor or nurse to teach a course for you and similar patients on better ways to work with your condition. Do not consult family or friends who are doctors who are not healthy. If they cannot 'walk the talk,' they are not really able to teach themselves accurately and cannot teach you.

Get regular check-ups at the clinic to keep on schedule with medications you are taking. Know what your height, weight, and blood pressure are. Find an old, smart doctor and visit her or him regularly, based on your condition.

Ensure that you have a plan for mental health care. Someone to talk with regularly is important: good friends, a wonderful spouse, a good sports partner, your parents, or elder relatives that respect you. If not, then formal counseling from an objective, trained mental health counsellor is important so that you can learn coping skills.

Set up a routine for taking your medicines. Ayurveda advocates for a helper to every patient who had a chronic disease, knowing that medicine alone does not cure lifestyle conditions successfully in most cases. Lifestyle diseases require us to be more conscious of how our lifestyle prevents us from taking those steps we need. Use the alarm clocks on your cellular phone to alert you on taking your pills or Ayurvedic treatments and routines. Have someone close to you remind you to take your medicines. Find someone to help you with oil massages, body care, or medicine preparation. Set up a pill box weekly so that you can have your medicines at hand.

Promote a healthy microbiome of organisms that live to benefit themselves and your body. Wash with soap only when excessively dirty or sweaty. Ayurveda advocates the use of environment-friendly dirt removers like lemon, yogurt,

bicarbonate, ash, and hot water. Do not over-use hand sanitizers. Put clothes for drying in the sun that has natural UV and antibiotic rays. Eat homemade yogurt when your appetite is healthy and your gut fire is high.

Use clothes medicinally. Called *ayurvedastra*, Ayurveda advocates the embedding of medicinal herbs such as turmeric, neem, and tulasi into cotton cloth for wearing. Examples include neem-soaked-and-dried burkhas, cotton scarfs soaked in turmeric and neem for neck rashes and skin tags and pillow covers soaked in neem for face rashes.

From April until October in most of India, wear cut cloth as few hours as possible during the day and night. For men, dhotis and sarongs are best. For women, sarongs, sarees, and shawls are best. They allow the body to breathe, and they promote evaporation of sweat. Wear pure fabrics only: cotton, linen, wool, and silk.

Spiritual World View

Ayurveda emphasises the power of the mind and the need for understanding our inner selves. Meditation every day is important. Rituals such as lighting of the lamp at sunrise, high noon, and sunset are modern reminders of the coming and going of the energy of the sun in the daily environment. These times can be used for mantra and engaging the inner self. Holidays are holy-days and should remind us to spend time with the inner holy self.

Cultivate relationships with Nature and animals. Plant a garden. Spend time every day somewhere amidst Nature to remember the connection of your spirit with the rest of the universe. Be aware of the changes in seasons and learn to adapt your routines consciously to the changes in the heat, the light, the waters, the vegetables that the earth produces. This practice of living in tune with the seasons is known in Ayurveda

as *ritucharya* and involves conscious choices of temperature and routine, such as eating soups in the cool season and cucumber in the warm season; or drinking hot, freshly-boiled water in the cold weather when the belly is not hot.

Find something new to learn each day that is inspiring. It will connect your spirit with your dharma when you take any steps forward. Ayurveda states that the first of the three main causes for disease is disrespect against the inner knower of true wisdom. When our conscience tells us to do something, who is telling us? From where does that wisdom come? That intelligent knower is the one-conscious, Brahman, to which we connect during our meditations. That stillness gives us the ability to hear and know that true wisdom. The rest of the time we move ignorantly against that true wisdom.

Svastha Vritta III: Embracing the Goal of Life, Hita

Ultimately, the reason we want to be cured from lifestyle diseases is to find and live in *Ayus*, roughly translated as ‘The Good Life’, called *hita-ayu* in Ayurveda.

A healthy long lifespan is marked by a state of aligned and awakened conscience and consciousness; a state of animation and hope, with flow in line with the environment; and strong sustenance of the physical and mental body-mind.


It is not one without suffering; it is one that allows a person to exist in a state of happiness no matter what happens for a few moments or lessons, and in a state of knowing one has lived a purposeful life. The good life is achieved by excelling in factors that promote longevity, strength, nourishment, delight, and happiness.

The *Charaka Samhita* details the qualities of the good life:

Detailed in the last chapter of the *Charaka Samhita*, Sutra-sthana, chapter 30, shloka 24,

the acharyas list the qualities of The Good Life:

Those who lead the good life have a content life, are not afflicted with physical and mental ailments, are endowed with youthfulness, enthusiasm, strength, virility, are endowed with reputation, manliness, boldness, those who have knowledge of the arts and sciences, those who have use of their sensory and motor faculties, objects of senses, and ability of the sense organs, those who are endowed with riches and various luxurious articles for enjoyment, those who achieve whatever they want and move as they like: these people lead a happy life. The good life is only achieved by having a useful life, with the following attitudes: are well-wishers of all creatures, do not aspire for the wealth of others, are truthful, peace-loving, examine things before acting upon them, are vigilant, enjoy the three important desires of life: virtue, wealth, and pleasure without the one affecting the other, respect superiors endowed with the knowledge of arts, sciences, and tranquility, serve elders, have full control over the six foes of passion, anger, envy, pride, and prestige, are constantly given to various types of charity, meditation, acquisition of knowledge, and solitude, have full knowledge of the power of Spirit and are devoted to it, make efforts both for the existing as well as the next life, are endowed with both memory and intelligence: these people lead a useful life.³

Ayurveda has not survived over five thousand years of conquests, fires, natural calamities, environmental changes, wars, and famines, to become extinct from the influences of modern living, modern medicine, and modern lifestyle diseases. Ayurveda is dynamic, contemporary, and evolving, amidst its constancy. Like Nature, it is strong and supple. If you take ten steps towards learning authentic Ayurveda, Ayurveda will take twenty steps to teach you about The Good Life. 

References

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Masonic Vedanta

Guy L Beck

(Continued from the previous issue)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA delivered two addresses on universal religion in California in 1900. In the first, 'The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion', he argued that all religions were supplementary and, when combined, led us to a higher truth. He stated, 'Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea.'⁵² What is most compelling about this address is his hint that the universal brotherhood and religion that he is seeking is already present in the world, working out its plan in silence among enlightened individuals. This resonates with the reality of Freemasonry as a silent social force in the world:

That universal religion about which philosophers and others have dreamed in every country already exists. It is here. As the universal brotherhood of man is already existing, so also is universal religion. ... Brotherhood already exists; only there are numbers of persons who fail to see this and only upset it by crying for new brotherhoods. Universal religion, too, is already existing (2.367).

The characteristics of the members of the brotherhood are lauded by him in the second essay of 1900 titled 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion':

So those who are *really* workers, and *really* feel at heart the universal brotherhood of man, do not talk much, do not make little sects for universal brotherhood; but their acts, their movements, their whole life, show out clearly that they in truth possess the feeling of brotherhood for mankind,

that they have love and sympathy for all. They do not speak, they *do* and they *live* (2.380).

Vivekananda locates this universal religion in Hindu tradition by citing scriptures and says that the teachings of Sri Krishna in the Bhagavadgita were in compliance with Masonic teachings:

So it is with this universal religion, which runs through all the various religions in the world in the form of God; it must and does exist through eternity. 'I am the thread that runs through all these pearls' [Gita, 7.7], and each pearl is a religion or even a sect thereof. Such are the different pearls, and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them; only the majority of mankind are entirely unconscious of it (2.381).

With characteristic boldness, his universalistic vision also conformed to the various paths of Yoga as outlined in the Gita: 'This combination will be the ideal of the nearest approach to a universal religion. ... To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions is *my* ideal of religion. And this religion is attained by what we, in India, call Yoga—union' (2.388). The four paths of Yoga are Karma Yoga, selfless action or work; Bhakti Yoga, devotion to God; Raja Yoga, discipline of the self; and Jnana Yoga, meditation on Brahman.

Swami Vivekananda, as a practical thinker, proposed a plan for humankind that would serve the purposes of the largely unseen universal brotherhood. He stated: 'If it be true that God is the centre of all religions, and that each of us is moving towards him along one of these radii, then it is certain that all of us *must* reach that centre.

And at the centre, where all the radii meet, all our differences will cease; but until we reach there, differences there must be' (2.384–5.) In terms of its structure, he then confided: 'What I want to propagate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds; it must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic, and equally conducive to action' (2.387). This conforms to the multivalent nature of both Vedanta and Masonic practice, whereby persons of all creeds and vocations work together to achieve a common goal.

His categorical praise of America for establishing a foundation for his universal religion of peace and tolerance is noteworthy. This can be understood from his knowledge of the Masonic influences in the formation of the US: 'Offer such a religion, and all the nations will follow you. ... It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion' (1.19). Furthermore, he salutes America outright: 'Hail, Columbia, motherland of liberty! ... it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilisation with the flag of harmony' (1.20).

Carl T Jackson has indicated Western influence in the teachings of Swami Vivekananda:

Swami Vivekananda's Indian lectures reflected a growing sensitivity to Western influence, perhaps because of his own attraction to Western conceptions. Certainly, the social message he now championed hinted influence from the West. The underlying philosophy was Hindu, but his emphasis on education, emergency and medical relief, and humanitarianism pointed to the West.⁵³

The strong Masonic emphasis on charity and relief of human suffering is certainly a prime contender for this formative influence, as few purely Hindu Vedantists worked toward these goals:

A rising number of Indians favored social reform and many more proclaimed themselves Vedantists, but few nineteenth-century Indians championed both social reform and Vedantism.

As an advocate of 'practical Vedanta', Vivekananda insisted that enlightenment could be attained through service to one's fellow human beings as much as through self-renunciation; work for others might be a form of worship. At the very least, his education and years in the West helped clarify and mold his ideas concerning social reform (*ibid.*).

Ramakrishna Mission

Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May 1897 in India. The mission statement emphasised service to others and advocated man's focus on adherence to duty while remaining detached from the reward. In Jackson's estimation, 'It seems clear that the Ramakrishna movement would almost surely not have embraced a program of humanitarianism and social welfare without Vivekananda's insistent urging' (31–2). According to Pratap Chandra Chunder, Vivekananda's humanitarianism sprung directly from his Masonic association, such that 'there was little basic difference between the ideals of charity preached by Freemasonry and Swami Vivekananda. Both set up organizations to give concrete shape to their concepts relating to charity in a broad humanitarian sense. ... Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of Freemasonry and gave it a concrete shape through his profession and practice.'⁵⁴ Certainly, it is observed that, 'Vivekananda's successors have clearly accepted his service ideal, making humanitarianism one of the Ramakrishna movement's identifying characteristics.'⁵⁵ Thus, even though Vivekananda had outwardly disconnected himself from both Freemasonry and the Brahmo Samaj, the relative ease and confidence with which he proclaimed universal brotherhood and humanitarianism in the West reflected his uncredited indebtedness to Masonic ideals.

Masonic Vedanta in the West

A new and unexpected turn of events had occurred

in the late eighteenth century that served to propel India and Hinduism into the world arena. This was the discovery of Sanskrit in the 1780s by British civil servants, and the realisation, initially by Sir William Jones, that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Persian, and eventually German and English, were grammatically connected over many centuries of history. This meant that Sanskrit, if not the 'mother of all languages' as initially thought by German Orientalists like Schlegel, was at least a cousin of the European languages as included in the vast Indo-European language family. After Jones, extensive research into comparative linguistics, mythology, and religion was conducted and published by Prof. Friedrich Max Muller of Oxford University. These studies contributed, in no small part, to the growing awareness of ancient Indo-Aryan thought and culture among esoteric thinkers, who contended that the Hindus, representing ancient Indo-Aryan peoples, were the modern inheritors of a vast fount of ancient wisdom and tradition. Partly in close harmony with the mid to late nineteenth-century fervour for all things associated with esotericism and perennial wisdom, several pioneers of Freemasonry and esotericism were drawn to the Hindu traditions, particularly in America. Of all esoteric Masonic authors in the West, the name of Albert Pike is the most important in this regard, as he absorbed many of the Hindu and Vedanta ideas and principles through his deep fascination with India.

Brother Albert Pike

Albert Pike (1809–91), was a Freemason, philosopher, esotericist, mystic, lawyer, poet, linguist, Civil War general, and prolific author. Noted for his military record and his penchant for intellectual pursuits, Pike was elected Sovereign Grand Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry in 1859, and almost single-handedly

rewrote the entire set of Scottish Rite rituals in order to incorporate esoteric wisdom from many ancient and foreign sources, including Hindu and Indo-Aryan traditions.⁵⁶ His signature work on Scottish Rite Masonry, *Morals and Dogma*, was published in 1871, and has remained in print ever since. Pike died in 1891, just two years before Brother Vivekananda arrived in America in 1893.

While he never visited India or the East, Albert Pike's ardent pursuit of esoteric studies led him to Hinduism and ancient Indo-Aryan religion and mythology. He studied Sanskrit and Avestan. Seeking authoritative sources for his studies of India and the Vedas, Albert Pike perused the writings of Friedrich Max Muller, the leading Indologist of his time and the founder of comparative religion, who had asserted that the Indo-European languages of Europe, Persia, and India descended from the unified Aryan tribes that spread their language and culture both East and West. Pike's studies of the Vedas, as well as the Persian Avesta of the Irano-Aryans, reached fruition in the publication of two mammoth works on ancient Aryan traditions, *Indo-Aryan Deities and Worship* on Vedic culture and religion and *Irano-Aryan Faith and Doctrine* on Iranian culture and religion, both published in 1872.⁵⁷

Dr Rex R Hutchens, scholar and historian of the Scottish Rite Research Society, summarised Albert Pike's position relative to ancient Aryan traditions in his book, *Pillars of Wisdom*: 'Pike believed the religions of the world contained the Primitive Truth—the Oneness of God, the trinity, and the spiritual survival of man after death—which he believed originated with the Aryans and which is revealed through an in-depth linguistic analysis of their written legacy.'⁵⁸

Hutchens then explains Pike's Unity Concept, which is based on Vedanta: 'Pike's purpose in describing Aryan and Persian beliefs is to reinforce his belief that all men originally

subscribed to the same religious doctrines, an idea called ... Pike's Unity Concept. Pike believed the many deities expressed in Hinduism, most of Aryan origin, were originally descriptions or attributes of One Supreme Deity still dimly recognized by the Hindus as Brahm [Brahman]' (114).

In assessing the value of Indo-Aryan wisdom, Albert Pike claimed to have found many of the basic teachings and morals espoused by Freemasonry in the Vedas. As a result, he included the names of Hindu and Indo-Aryan deities and concepts such as Brahma, Agni, Indra, and Om as primary sources of Masonic teachings within the rituals of the degrees of the Scottish Rite, especially in the thirty-second Degree, called the Master of the Royal Secret. The importance of this degree is explained by Hutchens in *A Bridge to Light*:

The degree of Master of the Royal Secret selects, clarifies and unifies into a single coherent doctrine all of the duties and lessons of the preceding degrees. In it we continue our journey eastward in search of the Holy Doctrine of which the Royal Secret is the foundation. To unveil the symbolism of the ages is a journey backward in time to the basic truths known by the ancient sages. ... Here we learn of the ancient Aryan religious doctrine. Pike believed it was the earliest religion. It was his opinion that these teachings were corrupted and elaborated until the true meaning was lost.⁵⁹

Albert Pike also included information on ancient India in his *Morals and Dogma* (1871), wherein he discussed the Vedas and Vedanta:

The spirit of the Vedas (or sacred Indian Books, of great antiquity), as understood by their earliest as well as most recent expositors, is decidedly a pantheistic monotheism—one God, and He all in all; the many divinities, numerous as the prayers addressed to them, being resolvable into the titles and attributes of a few, and ultimately into THE ONE.⁶⁰

This is augmented by an extended passage on

the Vedanta, which incorporates material from the Rig Veda hymn on the sacrifice of the primordial cosmic being or Purusha:⁶¹

The Vedanta philosophy, assuming the mystery of the 'ONE IN MANY' as the fundamental article of faith, maintained not only the Divine Unity, but the identity of matter and spirit. The unity which it advocates is that of one mind. Mind is the Universal Element, the One God, the Great Soul, Mahatma. He is the material as well as efficient cause, and the world is a texture of which he is both the web and the weaver. He is the Macrocosm, the universal organism called Purusha, of which Fire, Air, and Sun are only the chief members. His head is light, his eyes the Sun and moon, his breath the wind, his voice the opened Vedas. All proceeds from Brahm, like the web from the spider and the grass from the earth. Yet it is only the impossibility of expressing in language the origination of matter from spirit, which gives to Hindu philosophy the appearance of materialism. Formless Himself, the Deity is present in all forms. His glory is displayed in the Universe as the image of the Sun in water which is, yet is not, the luminary itself. All material agency and appearance, the subjective world, are to a great extent phantasms, the notional representations of ignorance. They occupy, however, a middle ground between reality and non-reality; they are unreal, because nothing exists but Brahm; yet in some degree real, inasmuch as they constitute an outward manifestation of Him. They are a self-induced hypostasis of the Deity, under which *He presents to Himself* the whole of animate and inanimate Nature, the actuality of the moment, the diversified *appearances* which successively invest the One Pantheistic spirit (672–3).

Both Pike and Vivekananda lived in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a vibrant time when the earlier discovery of Sanskrit and the importance of the religion of the ancient Indo-Aryans were gaining wide currency among intellectuals. In this regard Pike admired and studied

the writings of Max Muller on ancient India and the Vedas. Like Muller, Pike did not visit India, and based his vision of India on his personal studies and reflections. But unlike Muller, whose work was strictly academic, Pike responded to this new knowledge with a practical application towards the edification of the common man in the wisdom of the Orient. Swami Vivekananda actually met with Prof. Max Muller in Oxford in 1896, and had very sympathetic talks with him, inspiring Muller to write a book on Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda was moved by Muller's devotion to India and declared, 'Max Muller is a Vedantist of Vedantists. He has, indeed, caught the real soul of the melody of the Vedanta, in the midst of all its settings of harmonies and discords—the one light that lightens the sects and creeds of the world, the Vedanta, the one principle of which all religions are only applications.'⁶²

The universal teachings of both Freemasonry and Vedanta provided invisible links between Pike in the West and Vivekananda in the East. Although Pike never met Vivekananda, they both nurtured a similar feature of Masonic Vedanta: the vision of a universal religion based upon humanitarianism and ancient Indo-Aryan spirituality. For both, the sacred Vedas reinforced Freemasonry's tenets and each sought to practically apply these tenets in his own way: Pike through his supervision of the Supreme Council and the implementation of Hindu elements in the advanced rituals of the Scottish Rite degrees, and Vivekananda through his Practical Vedanta and the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission as a universal charitable order of monks. Albert Pike was the most famous Mason of his time in America, and Swami Vivekananda was the most celebrated Hindu of his day in the West, and later in the East. Both, as Freemasons, inculcated ancient Indian teachings in their lectures and writings, and sought a practical 'Masonic' and 'Vedantic'

solution to a world viewed as rapidly descending into the throes of intolerance and fanaticism.

Additional esoteric connections between Freemasonry, Gnosticism, occult traditions, Vedanta, and Buddhist wisdom are proliferated in the writings associated with the Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, in New York City by Helena P Blavatsky and Henry S Olcott. This society also helped to establish a new form of non-gender-specific Freemasonry in India while contributing to the Indian Nationalist Movement. Annie Besant, the leader of the Theosophical Society in India during the early twentieth century (1907–33) and an activist for Indian freedom, wrote extensively on Hinduism and Yoga. Ms Besant also established Co-Masonry, a co-ed form of occult Freemasonry, in England in 1902 after she had taken initiation from a Co-Masonic lodge in Paris. Both she and her co-worker Charles W Leadbeater became pioneer Theosophists as well as Co-Masons in India. Brother Leadbeater wrote profusely on Masonic traditions and Hindu wisdom from his residence in South India. In addition, many of the officers at the Theosophical headquarters in Adyar, Madras, have been active Co-Masons including many of the present officers who are thirty-third degree Co-Masons.

Hindu-Masonic Syncretism

The mutual encounters between Hinduism and Freemasonry have also generated articles and semi-scholarly studies that struggled to reconcile the two seemingly divergent ideologies into a kind of Hindu-Masonic syncretism, extending the notion of Masonic Vedanta into the twentieth-century.⁶³ The following three selections reflect a diversity of Hindu-Masonic thought.

The first selection is by S V Haldipur, whose lecture before the Shimla Masonic Study Circle in 1927 was later published as a small booklet entitled *Freemasonry Interpreted in the Light of Hindu*

Philosophy (1936). In an effort to show correspondences between Freemasonry and Hinduism, Haldipur first suggested a few similarities between King Solomon's Temple and the temples of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and India, namely, the progression from Outer Chamber, to Middle Chamber, to Inner Sanctum. As these three stages are prevalent in Hindu temple ritual, he then explained them in terms of the Three Degrees of Freemasonry, and homologised the three Hindu deities of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, to the three officers of a lodge, namely the Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden. The steps in each of the three degrees were then interpreted according to the process of Yoga outlined in the *Yoga Sutra*, with the goal of moksha, 'freedom from rebirth', being offered as a parallel or precursor to the goal of 'Free'-masonry, 'freedom'. Haldipur then posited a correlation between the seven chakras of Kundalini-Yoga and the Three Degrees of Masonry. The Masonic symbol of the Square and Compass was also given a Hindu exegesis: 'The Square was perhaps originally the geometrical figure with four sides representing the four Vedas and the Compass was probably the equilateral triangle minus one side. An equilateral triangle among Hindus is a sacred symbol representing God, the three sides representing Sat, Chit, and Ananda attributes. A combination of the Square and the equilateral triangle would mean "God as revealed in the Vedas", or "Vedas as containing the word of God".'⁶⁴

In an article appearing in the *Indian Masonic Journal* (1950), a monthly periodical published from Hyderabad beginning January 1947, G K Pillai consulted the ancient Indian architectural texts in order to understand both the building of King Solomon's Temple and the underlying structure of Freemasonry. Though not convincing historically, Pillai's argument raises the interesting question of the early transfer of ancient Indian 'Masonic' or 'Shilpi' techniques and secrets to Israel via

Babylon. Vishvakarma, the mythic founder of Indian architecture, is juxtaposed with King Solomon: 'Among the Silpis [artisans], Vishvakarma and Tvastar [assistant] occupy the same position as King Solomon and Hiram Abiff in English Freemasonry.'⁶⁵ Hiram Abiff is generally stated by Masons to be the paradigmatic master builder and Mason connected with King Solomon's Temple.

In the third selection, Surendra Nath Mitra, a Bengali Mason, discussed the Three Degrees of Masonry in terms of the recitation of the Hindu sacred syllable Om or AUM, in a short book called *Freemasonry Explained* (1971). As all Masons know, the great secret in the Masonic quest is the recovery or discovery of the 'Lost Word', the name of God which serves as a master-key for unlocking the mysteries of the universe: 'Everyone who has devoted full attention to the study of the ritual of Speculative Freemasonry must admit that the Word constitutes the central point around which the whole system of Masonic symbolism revolves. Its possession is the consummation of all Masonic knowledge; when lost, its recovery is the sole object of all symbolic, Masonic labor.'⁶⁶ Indeed, 'The loss and the recovery of the Word constitute the foundation on which the entire system of Masonic symbolism is built' (103). According to Mitra, and indeed many Hindu Masons, the 'Lost Word' of Freemasonry is the Sanskrit syllable Om, the most holy utterance in Hindu ritual, Vedic and Tantric. Mitra even proclaimed that, 'I can sit down and write a book and show you that the teachings of Freemasonry are all based on the doctrines of the Hindu religion. I could quote you a sloka [verse] from the *Bhagavad-Gita* and/or the Upanishads for practically every doctrine of Freemasonry' (111). He stressed during a lecture that, 'The syllable OM represents the external sound through which relationship with God can be established. ... If you like, we can try it here and now. Just concentrate your mind on something, anything ...

then say after me three times O ... M ...' (112). Taking help from the syllable Om, according to Mitra, places one in the Middle Chamber, or at the Second Degree of Masonry, after which one is qualified to enter the Inner Chamber, or the stage of Master Mason, Third Degree. The above examples provide strong evidence of indigenous attempts to synchronise the tenets of Freemasonry with accepted principles of the Hindu tradition.

Grand Lodge of India


The complex blending of Hinduism, Vedanta, and Freemasonry survives today in the many lodges that are affiliated with the Grand Lodge of India, GLI, established on 24 November 1961 as a separate body from the European lodges. Until 1961, Masonic lodges in India were chartered and governed by the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Grand Lodge of India contains about 356 Lodges, many of which, under the new Indian Grand Lodge system, bear Sanskrit, Hindu-related names, indicating sustained compatibility between Hindu and Masonic ideals. For example, there is Vishvanath Lodge in Bombay; Ganges, Aryavarta, Hindustan, and Suryodaya Lodges in Kanpur; Vidya and Shanti Lodges in Madras; and Sri Brihadishvara Lodge in Tanjore. The presence of Vishvakarma Lodge in Ludhiana suggests the acceptance of Vishvakarma as a counterpart to the Masonic 'Great Architect of the Universe'. Other interesting lodge names include Mother India; Buddha, Aryan, Light of Zoroaster, Golden Pagoda, and Maharaja. Lodge Vivekananda at Kanyakumari in South India is where Swami Vivekananda meditated on a rock island. All lodges display five Volumes of the Sacred Law, VSL, and conduct business in English.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to present a brief portrait of Freemasonry in India, along with

the developments leading to the phenomenon of Masonic Vedanta. Freemasonry had begun in England with very high ideals of universal brotherhood and equality, the same ideals which helped to foment the major revolutions in Europe and America. Yet the quick exportation of Masonic lodges to non-Western countries resulted in these ideals being subjected to rigorous trials. It was particularly in India, with the overriding presence of a large non-European cultural and religious clientele, that the Masonic principles faced their most significant challenge. While it seemed an uphill battle to win the hearts of the colonial Masons over to the possibility of Hindu Masons, it was due to the diligent efforts of aspiring Indian Masons that India proved to be a place where the Masonic principles of universal brotherhood and equality would blossom into something like Masonic Vedanta, a fascinating yet complex phenomenon in the confluence of religious ideas. The European Masons, having grown accustomed to placing only the Bible on the altar of their own lodges, were obligated in foreign lands to include other volumes of sacred law next to the Bible in recognition of other brands of monotheism. As we have seen, the Indian situation was resolved by negotiation and argument, as well as through theological adjustment between polytheism and monotheism. Aspiring Hindu Masons took the British Masons to task, while at the same time underscoring the features of Hinduism which were most closely aligned to Freemasonry, namely the presence of Vishvakarma, the belief in immortality and especially Vedanta conceptions of a unified theistic Brahman, and rejecting those aspects deemed unfavourable, that is polytheism, icon worship, and caste distinctions. The discarded aspects were also believed by the reformers to have been either absent or negligible in the ancient Indo-Aryan traditions, thus strengthening their case. The pinnacle of this achievement in

the East is found in the life and work of Swami Vivekananda, who was not only well-versed in the Upanishads and Vedanta texts like many Hindu saints, but was uniquely able, with his vast knowledge of Western philosophy, to recognise the unifying principles of Vedanta within non-Indian traditions and create a thorough universal practical Vedanta more than anyone else in his time or perhaps ever. And in the West with the wide proliferation of the Scottish Rite rituals designed by Albert Pike, many acknowledge Vedic Hinduism as a principal ancient source of Freemasonry.

With these situations in place, many thinkers have since helped to accelerate interest in Vedanta among a wide spectrum of the educated masses in both the East and West, such that it has become possible in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to think about and discuss the real possibilities of universal brotherhood or universal religion based upon academic and spiritual foundations. Some of these ideas appear controversial in today's world, such as a politically constructed New World Order. However, a silent and subtle substratum of 'Masonic Vedanta', blending the universal Vedanta propagated by Swami Vivekananda with the pioneering work of Albert Pike in establishing Vedanta and Hindu themes within Freemasonry, suggests an interesting potential formula for real world peace. Masonic Vedanta thus represents a true and authentic fusion between East and West. 

Notes and References

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53. Carl T Jackson, *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994), 31.
54. Pratap Chandra Chunder, *Brother Vivekananda*: (Calcutta: Lodge Anchor and Hope, 1984), 25.
55. *Vedanta for the West*, 76.
56. The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite was originally founded in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1801. It contains thirty-two Degrees with an additional thirty-third Degree which is honorary. Many of Pike's rituals contain esoteric wisdom drawn from India and the ancient world, and are still performed in most of the United States. For additional information on Albert Pike and the Scottish Rite degree system, see Guy L Beck, 'Celestial Lodge Above: The Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem as a Religious Symbol in Freemasonry', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 4/1 (October 2000), 28-51.
57. See Albert Pike, *Indo-Aryan Deities and Worship* (Washington DC: The Supreme Council, 1872; reprinted in 1930), and *Irano-Aryan Faith and Doctrine* (Washington DC: The Supreme Council, 1872; reprinted in 1924).
58. Rex R Hutchens, *Pillars of Wisdom* (Washington, DC: The Supreme Council, 1995), 113.
59. Rex R Hutchens, *A Bridge to Light* (Washington DC: The Supreme Council, 1988; reprinted 1995), 310-1. Rex R Hutchens also created helpful works relative to Pike's writings. See *A Glossary to Morals and Dogma* (Washington DC: The Supreme Council, 1993) and *Albert Pike's Lecture on Masonic Symbolism and a Second Lecture on Symbolism* (Washington DC: Scottish Rite Research Society, 2006).
60. Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Washington DC: The Supreme Council, 1969), 672.
61. See Rig Veda, 10.90.
62. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 4.281.
63. The following three selections were discovered during research conducted at the library in Freemason's Hall, Calcutta, in 1993. Freemason's Hall has been at 19 Park Street since 1904, and houses the office of the District Grand Master of Bengal.
64. Wor. Bro. S V Haldipur, *Freemasonry Interpreted in the Light of Hindu Philosophy* (Shimla: 1936), 16.
65. Wor. Bro. G K Pillai, 'Freemasonry in Ancient India', *Indian Masonic Journal* (February 1950), 34.
66. Surendra Nath Mitra, *Freemasonry Explained* (Jamshedpur: Surendra Nath Mitra, 1971), 103.
67. For more information on worldwide Freemasonry, consult Kent Henderson, *Masonic World Guide: A Guide to Grand Lodges of the World for the Travelling Freemason* (London: Lewis Masonic, 1984).

Memory

Swami Satyamayananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

MEMORY PRESUPPOSES an identity of the self, the empirical ego. The self that has experienced something before is the same that recalls the impressions and recognises the object in the present. For, in the absence of continuity there would be confusion of memory and disintegration of personality. Intelligent life itself would be impossible. The orthodox as well as the Jain philosophers severely criticised the Buddhist doctrine of the non-self that if there is no distinct self but just a mass of experiences, then what is the guarantee that one person's memory cannot be recalled by another like the eating of food by one person will satisfy the hunger of another? And the subsequent illogicality of admitting any law regarding the origination of memory becomes insurmountable. Moreover, if there is no permanent self, the evildoer will get away from one's memory and its result, physical or mental punishment. Similarly a person's good karma could go to someone else. People would stop being moral and would be inclined to rob and tear each other. Social life would become impossible. An impression is endowed with a potency to revive itself; it will rise and exact its results: 'As you sow so shall you reap.' But the soil of a self is indispensable for it. In psychologically aberrant behaviour, something or someone very powerful, takes hold of the personality, shakes it, turns it inside out, and rips it. There is some agency in subliminal perception and intuition—a self that is different from the conscious, which sorts, infers, and uses the subconscious ocean of impressions and karma.

Karma and Rebirth

Mental impressions and karma are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. One may fail to recall an impression or the karma, but it is there—undeniable and indelible. A part of this karma aspect has a deeper dimension, if it is not exhausted in this one life it has to inevitably work itself out in another life. A cause must give rise to an effect:

When I look at you in the lake of my mind there is a wave. That wave subsides, but it remains in fine form, as an impression. We understand a physical impression remaining in the body. But what proof is there for assuming that the mental impression can remain in the body, since the body goes to pieces? ... So far it is clear then, that this impression is in the mind, that the mind comes to take its birth and rebirth, and uses the material which is most proper for it, and that the mind which has made itself fit for only a particular kind of body will have to wait until it gets that material. ... there is hereditary transmission so far as furnishing the material to the soul is concerned. But the soul migrates and manufactures body after body, and each thought we think, and each deed we do, is stored in it in fine forms, ready to spring up again and take a new shape. When I look at you a wave rises in my mind. It dives down, as it were, and becomes finer and finer, but it does not die. It is ready to start up again as a wave in the shape of memory.¹

Sri Ramakrishna explains 'manufactures body after body' clearly: 'Potters put their pots in the sun to bake ... sometimes cattle trample over them. When the baked pots are broken, the potters

throw them away; but when the soft ones are broken they keep them. They mix them with water and put the clay on the wheel and make new pots.²

Samskaras can be Vividly Seen, Interpreted, and Destroyed

Samskaras are of two kinds: *karmashaya*, karma impressions and *jnanashaya*, knowledge impressions. The former fructifies as: *jati-ayur-bhoga*, species, lifespan, and enjoyment of pleasure and pain; the latter is devoid of this power. Knowledge of a pot or a cloth will not make one take rebirth but if one desires these objects, then they shall bind. *Karmashaya* can give rise to, and also turn into *jnanashaya*; similarly *jnanashaya* can turn into *karmashaya*. This is the receptacle of the mind. Patanjali states in the *Yoga Sutra*: 'By perceiving the impressions (comes) the knowledge of past lives.'³ This statement makes it clear that impressions lying in one's own mind can be seen. This power comes to the yogi through the practice of very deep concentration called *samyama*. It comprises of concentration, meditation, and absorption, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. The mind purified through this practice can see its own contents and the yogi can know what the past lives were and when and where the present body will fall. In the higher stages of yoga the mental impressions are destroyed. Like the residue of tea leaves in a kettle that can be seen from outside, and like these used tea leaves are no longer usable, so are these *samskaras* after being burnt by the fire of yoga. Karma and *samskaras* being the front and back of the same thing, technically, are both burnt but the trace remains and it is due to this that faint memories are left that no longer disturb the yogi. Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this: 'It is like a burnt rope, which appears to be a rope but disappears at the slightest puff' (940). This is the real destruction of *samskaras*; no other means can do so. The Indian mind has

a strong belief in the remembrance of past lives. Buddha also had a memory of his five hundred previous births and this memory was the basis of the popular *Jataka Tales*. In the Bhagavadgita Sri Krishna tells Arjuna: 'Many are the births that have been passed by Me and thee, O Arjuna. I know them all, whilst you know them not.'⁴

Plato's Doctrine of Anamnesis

The doctrine of transmigration of the soul is peculiarly Indian. The innumerable references to *metempsychosis*, soul migration or *metempsychosis*, re-embodiment of the soul that is found in ancient Greek literature especially in the *Dialogues of Plato* had percolated from Indic sources. Pythagoras (570–495 BCE), the great philosopher, mathematician, and thinker, believed in reincarnation and is said to have recall of his previous lives. He was influenced strongly by Indian thought and is credited with forming many communities comprising both men and women that moulded their lives on reincarnation and asceticism. Plato (427–347 BCE), in his *Phaedrus*, talks of the doctrine of retribution or karma and the influence of conduct in the present lifetime will ensure reincarnation accordingly. Will Durant says: 'Some Upanishads are older than any extant form of Greek philosophy, and Pythagoras, Parmenides and Plato seem to have been influenced by Indian metaphysics.'⁵

(To be concluded)

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28. Patanjali, *Yoga Sutra*, 3.18.
29. Gita, 4.5.
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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Kālaśakti: Bhartrihari's Philosophy of Time

Tandra Patnaik

D K Printworld (P) Ltd, Vedaśri,
F-395, Sudarshan Park, New Delhi
110 015. www.dkprintworld.com. xi
+ 204 pp. 2014. ₹ 540. HB. ISBN
9788124607589.

Time, *kala*, is one of the four dimensions of things we see in the world, the other three being length, breadth, and height. Apart from these physical dimensions, everything exists in time. This fourth dimension changes, moment by moment.

A thing perceived this moment is not the same, the next moment, though it appears to be the same. The changing object in the changing world is an enigma. Many philosophers, both from the East and the West, could not so far tackle this problem satisfactorily.

The analysers of languages or the grammarians have been considering this aspect of language and the conjugation of verbs in any language throws light on this dimension. The grammar of every language provides for expressions of time with reference to nouns and verbs, expressing such states as past, present, and future. The richness of a language depends on its capacity to express this fourth dimension of time. Grammar of every language has to provide for words expressing time as the fourth dimension. The more one studies grammar, the more one enters into the realm of philosophy.

The book under review provides enough material for a thorough study of the concept of time, not only grammatically but philosophically as well. Apart from studying the philosophers of the West, the author deals with time as a mental construct.

The author summarises Bhartrihari's views on time. Subsequent chapters analyse the concept of time according to various philosophical schools such as Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Buddhism, and Yoga. The author also deals with the divisibility of time.

There are discussions on time and creation, *maya*, *avidya*, and *shabdabrahman*. The semantic and ontological perspectives have also been elaborated.

The entire reading is a wonderful experience not only for grammarians but for all those interested in the philosophical basis of linguistics. In producing this book the author has cleared the way for both linguists and philosophers. This book will be a valuable addition to personal and public libraries.

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Honorary Professor of Sanskrit

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Mumbai



Thirumazhisai Piran's Tirucchanda Viruttam

Vankeepuram Rajagopalan

V Rajagopalan, 5, Third Canal Cross
Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai
600 020. xii + 129 pp. ₹ 150. PB. ISBN
9788190297967.

It is hard enough to translate a typical Tamil treatise into English. But when a book of Tamil verses in which classical Tamil diction is harnessed to the articulation of mystic and devotional feelings of a super-devotee of the calibre of Alvars, who literally remain submerged in the depths of the ocean of devotion, is taken up for translation, the task is really herculean. The author should first be complimented for his nerve in launching on an admittedly daunting task and in making of it a reasonable success.

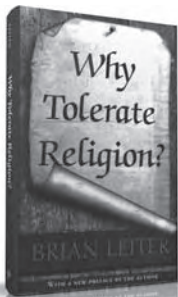
But, any translation can only reproduce the thoughts of the original in a mechanical manner. This is because the original work, particularly of the author of the stature of Tirumazhisai Alvar, is in its deepest sense, a work of devotional intuition. Intellectual gymnastics and verbal jugglery can be replicated but intuitional flights of feelings and thoughts cannot be recreated and reproduced. The rendition of the Alvar's mystic outpourings in

devotion-charged Tamil into an ill-fitted tongue of English is bound to have the limitations implicit in the yawning gulf between Tamil and English in their structural forms and practical uses. When these practical limitations are taken into account, the author should be deemed to have done a marvellous job of presenting the towering Alvar on the modernistic platform of English.

Spanning one hundred and twenty verses, the translation of *Tirucchanda Viruttam* promises to be an uplifting pilgrimage to the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Narayana. Those who are well-versed in Tamil and English have the advantage of comparing the English rendition with the Tamil original and critically appreciating the nuances of the charm or otherwise of the English translation. Those who are not sufficiently acquainted with Tamil can certainly have an exciting peek into the devotional beauties of the Alvar's mental and temperamental landscape. This book is certainly one more feather in the cap of the author whose literary expedition, with the translation of the entire work of immortal *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* as its avowed goal, is set to continue with unabated enthusiasm.

The book sports a colourful garb, with the pictures of the majestic gopurams of Vaishnava Temples adorning the outer covers and four illustrations inside. The notes offered by the author to selected verses are very helpful and illuminating. Two forewords by eminent scholars and a scholarly introduction by the author add to the value of the book. Devotees of Lord Narayana are bound to find the book inspiring and inebriating.

N Hariharan
Madurai



Why Tolerate Religion?

Brian Leiter

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. Website: press.princeton.edu. 2014. xxiii + 187 pp. \$17.95. PB. ISBN 9780691163543.

Religion and the religious have always been enjoying a special status or exemption in the legal and social systems throughout the world, which sometimes goes against those who are not affiliated to any religion and its practices. It can be said that

secularism came to disestablish religion and to rescue society from the bindings of religious beliefs and practices. Western democracies, in the context of this book, have been allowing legal exemption to different religious practices, in spite of them not appearing to comply always with purely moral considerations. The author challenges this religious liberty along with religious beliefs themselves.

The arguments begin with trying to establish a clear basis of differentiation between religious and moral claims of conscience. The examples are taken of a Sikh boy having to carry a dagger even in school premises as a religious obligation and another rural boy who has to carry a knife passed on by his father to him as social or family tradition maintained across the generations in their tribe, as a mark of their entering manhood. Both these sample cases are presented to analyse these religious and moral obligations of conscience. The very foundations and validity of religious beliefs are questioned making every attempt to disqualify religious belief as '*widely accepted culpable false belief*' (79).

In general, the author needs deeper understanding and presentation of religion and religious beliefs rather than projecting only a one-sided view of them. His *fanatically secularist* approach also cannot completely justify the moral, or non-religious, obligation of conscience. No moral framework can be universal in space and eternal in time, thereby making itself vulnerable to similar critical analysis as of religion and religious beliefs. The constitutional systems of different democracies work on the basis of the collective conscience founded on the history and faith of those people in the relevant socio-political context. Neither the religious nor the non-religious can be exempted from the generally applicable laws, but the judgement of their respective beliefs and practices should be done without jeopardising their individual faith and freedom so far as it does not harm or risk others. By evolving a comprehensive system of judgement wherein one is judged according to the high moral standards or ideals of one's own religious affiliation may help resolve the social dilemmas mentioned in the book. This book has extensive references with almost forty pages of notes by the author along with selected bibliography.

PB

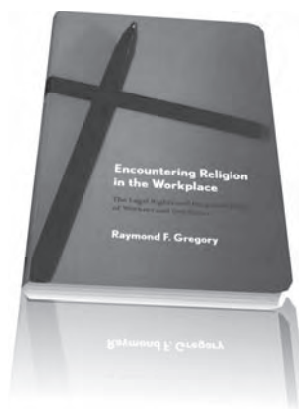
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***Encountering Religion in the Workplace:
The Legal Rights and Responsibilities of
Workers and Employers***

Raymond F Gregory

Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State
Street, Ithaca, NY 14850. 2011. viii + 265 pp. \$20.95.
PB. ISBN 9780801476600.



THE WORKPLACE is a community, a place where nearly all Americans spend a great deal of time, where friendships and relationships are initiated and developed, where life challenges are encountered, and where we find opportunities to contribute to society. But the workplace is also a place where some workers pray with other workers and discuss their religious beliefs and practices. Many American workers refuse to conduct their lives in one way on their Sabbath and in an entirely different manner on the other days of the week, and thus they endeavor to integrate their religious and work lives. It should not surprise us, then, that an increasing number of Americans of all faiths find the workplace an appropriate and fitting site to express their religious and spiritual values.

Employees are not alone in introducing religion to the workplace, as more than one employer has travelled that path. For example, an employer that inaugurates work practices designed to foster a Christian work ethic must determine how best to accomplish that goal without violating the rights of its non-Christian employees; if it fails in that regard, one group or another of its workers may charge it with proselytizing. An employer that finds it advantageous to allow a group of workers greater leeway in

expressing their religious beliefs may become a target of other groups of workers who charge it with favouritism, or even worse, with bias, prejudice, or intentional discrimination.

Now that religion has been thrust into the workplace—to an extent those living in previous eras could not have imagined—workers are emboldened to assert their legal rights to protect themselves from acts of discrimination—real or merely perceived—that threaten the way they express their religious beliefs in office or factory. Consequently, workplace religious disputes are now more likely to be resolved only after lengthy and contentious litigation.

Students studying for admission to the bar acquire knowledge of the law through the ‘case-book method’—they learn the law by reading groups of court cases assembled in book form. In this work I employ a modified form of that method. I have selected court cases illustrating various aspects of religious employment disputes and have summarized them for the reader. By reviewing these case summaries, readers should gain an understanding of the basic legal concepts applicable to the resolution of these disputes and thus be equipped to undertake measures appropriate to the circumstances they themselves encounter in the workplace.

The modified form of the casebook method is not without its limitations. While law students read actual court cases, readers of this book will read case summaries. Nearly every judicial decision examines more than a few relevant issues, but we will generally focus on the single issue in the case that is central to the point of law under consideration. Quoting the exact language of the court is the best approach to gaining a correct understanding of its ruling, but quoting the court is generally not feasible when we are examining only one of the many issues it considered. In most instances, these circumstances require the relevant aspects of the opinion to be summarized rather than cited word for word. In the interest of accuracy, when summarizing a ruling, I have closely tracked the court's language whenever possible.

The second limitation of the modified form of the casebook method may, in some instances, lead to a bit of frustration for the readers—they may learn the law relevant to the court's determination, but they may not always learn the ultimate outcome of the case under discussion. Actual trials of religious discrimination cases occur less frequently than the public supposes. More frequently, legal claims alleging religious discrimination are settled by the parties to the dispute at some point in the litigation process, most often before the case reaches the trial stage. Because jury trials present substantial risks for employers, they generally attempt to avoid the courtroom and a sitting jury whenever possible. The motion for summary judgment affords the employer the opportunity to procure an early dismissal of a worker's case, thus avoiding a trial before a jury. A motion for summary judgment requires the court to assess the evidence that the employer and the worker intend to offer during the course of the trial so as to determine

whether a genuine need for a trial actually exists. If the court finds that the evidence to be offered is insufficient to allow a jury to reach a verdict for the worker, the court will grant the employer's motion for summary judgment. At that point, the court dismisses the worker's complaint. Unless the worker appeals, the case is over. But on the other hand, if the court finds the worker's evidence to be sufficient, it will deny the employer's motion for summary judgment and direct the parties to proceed to trial. In those circumstances, more often than not, an employer will opt to settle the dispute rather than face a jury.

This book has been written for laypersons and those lawyers who do not specialize in employment law. Every attempt has been made to eliminate technical language and legal jargon and to preclude immersion in legal intricacies and technical data having less than general application. In the discussion of areas where some technical knowledge of the law is required, emphasis has been placed on the law's general applicability without regard to its exceptions. The broad picture takes precedence over special circumstances that may be relevant only in a limited number of instances. The right to practice one's religion in the work area comes with limitations. That is the primary subject matter of this book—limitations. Under what circumstances is a worker limited in practicing his or her religious beliefs in the workplace? We will closely examine issues emanating from the presence of religious practice and expression in the American workplace and study the perceptions of the parties involved in the religious disputes that so often occur. With studies of this sort, perhaps the resolution of such disputes in the future may be accomplished with a greater degree of intelligence and with far less contention than has been the case to this time.



REPORTS

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversaries of the Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur held special lectures on 25 and 26 February 2015 in commemoration of the 150th birth anniversaries of Swamis Saradanandaji Maharaj and Trigunatitanandaji Maharaj.

In commemoration of 150th birth anniversary of Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi**, conducted the following programmes from September 2014 to March 2015: (i) A cycle rally from the Ashrama to Palashi (Plassey) on 23 September in which 250 cyclists participated. (ii) Inauguration of the newly built science centre, with a demonstration gallery and a hands-on workshop, on 29 November. (iii) Inauguration of the newly built community hall and a 9-day fair on the theme 'Means for Enriching Livelihood in Rural Areas' by Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 20 March. (iv) Releasing of a commemorative volume and a booklet by the General Secretary on 20 March. (v) Four seminars from 21 to 25 March on topics related to health, nutrition, agriculture, and animal husbandry. On an average, 850 people comprising scientists, lecturers, students, and farmers participated in each seminar. (vi) Cultural programmes from 20 to 27 March. (vii) Annapurna Puja and a devotees' convention on 28 March in which about 9,500 devotees took part.



Construction of Girls' Hostel in Dehradun

News of Branch Centres

On the occasion of the birthday of Sant Eknath, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad** held a medical camp and an exhibition on Swamiji from 12 to 14 March at Paithan, Dist. Aurangabad, the birthplace of the saint. In all, 2,574 patients were treated in the medical camp.

Sikshanamandira, College of Teacher Education, of **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha** has been re-accredited by NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) with Grade 'A'.

On 8 March, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the six-storey diagnostic and cardiac care centre building and the newly set-up Catheterization Laboratory, cath lab, at **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan**.

An MPED student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University's** Faculty of General and Adapted Physical Education and Yoga (GAPEY), **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Coimbatore** Campus, represented Tamil Nadu state in the 3rd National Footvolley Championship 2015-16, held by Punjab Footvolley Association in Punjab, and secured third position.

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban has started in March a new welfare programme at its hospital, by which widows in

distress and requiring medical care will be provided free of charges all medical facilities including diagnostic tests, medication and surgery, and also an attendant, if necessary, while they are admitted to the hospital.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka held the concluding function of the centenary celebration of its high school on 28 March. The programme consisted of speeches by some distinguished speakers, cultural events and releasing of a commemorative volume.

Relief

As the massive cloud burst and flash floods hit a major portion of Uttarakhand in June 2013, unprecedented devastation followed causing severe damage to life and property. In the wake of such human sufferings, the Ramakrishna Mission plunged in to ameliorate the sufferings of the affected people from 23 June 2013 onwards.

Primary Relief • The Kankhal and Dehradun centres of the Ramakrishna Mission undertook relief activities in 291 villages at Rudraprayag, Sonprayag, Guptakashi, Uttarkashi, Ukhimath, Pandukeshwar, Govindghat and Niti block areas. They distributed food items, assorted and winter garments, solar lanterns, utensils and other essential items catering to 19,513 families. Besides, school uniform and other supplies were also distributed to 16,839 students from 275 schools in Joshi Math and Rudraprayag areas.

Rehabilitation • The Ramakrishna Mission then took up rehabilitation project in the area. The girls' hostel of the Anusuya Prasad Bahuguna Government Post Graduate College at Agastya-muni, Dist. Rudraprayag, was severely damaged by the flood. The Ramakrishna Mission considered that building a girls' hostel for this college will be a great service to the undeveloped Kedar Valley, especially to the girls seeking their much deserved education.

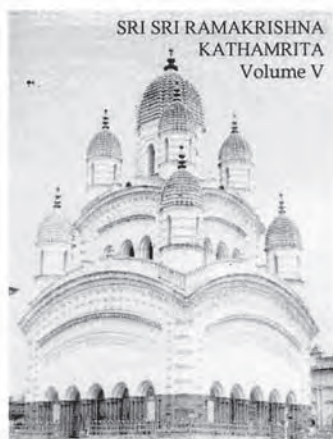
The Ramakrishna Mission, through its Dehradun centre, took up the construction work of a new hostel building and a new educational block

at the Government P G College, Agastya-muni as a part of its rehabilitation project. The three-storeyed Girls' Hostel with kitchen and dining hall and a three storied P G Block of the college is being constructed with a total covered area of 28,442 square feet. The foundation stone was laid on 29 August 2014.

Till now, roof castings for the second floor of the PG Block and first floor of the Girls' Hostel has been completed. 

Ramakrishna Mission Welfare Section Belur Math, Howrah Short Report from April 2014 to March 2015		
Particulars	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount (₹)
Stipend to students	3,700	74,02,786
Monthly Pecuniary Help (@ ₹ 300/- per month)	306	17,70,100
Ad hoc Pecuniary Help	304	81,400
Medical Help	260	3,37,405
For Handicapped Persons :		
Tricycles	2	16,240
Wheel Chair	1	
Ad hoc Pecuniary Help (@ ₹ 1000/-)	1	
Sarees, School Dress, Blanket, Garments.		28,73,743
Other Expenses		99,512
Total		1,25,81,186

Details of new clothings distributed among 19,432 beneficiaries	
Particulars	Quantity
Dhoti	1,611
Saree	12,034
Blanket	2,058
Children's Garment	7,193
Upper Wrapper	330
Woolen Wrapper	40
School Bag	3,303



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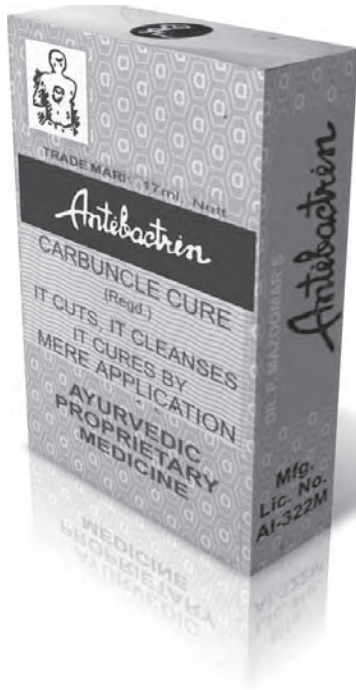


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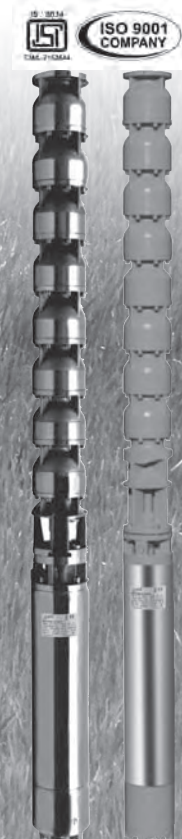
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Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium

(A Branch Centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, West Bengal)

Po-Sanatorium, Tupudana, Ranchi – 835221, Jharkhand, Email: rkmtbs@gmail.com

‘The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion.’—Swami Vivekananda

An Appeal

Spread over 285 acres, Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium in a backward area of Jharkhand, serves the patients suffering from the deadly disease of tuberculosis. Inaugurated in the year 1951 by Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of Republic India, the centre was master planned and executed by Srimat Swami Vedantanandaji, Swami Atmasthananda Ji and many other pioneering monks of the Ramakrishna Order. The sanatorium has been the only asylum for the poor TB patients in this area over the last 60 years.

As there has been a decline in TB cases, the Mission has opened its doors to patients suffering from other diseases too. To meet the increasing need for medical care, we wish to convert this sanatorium into a full-fledged hospital bringing relief to the suffering poor.

Our Project plans are as follows:

- **150-beds Hospital** exclusively for TB patients—(recurring expenditure 3 crores p.a.)
- **50-beds hospital** for general patients other than TB and O.P.D recurring expenditure of Rs 1 crore p.a.
- **Upgradation** of medical equipment—estimated cost is Rs 10 crores
- **General medicine**, radiology, ultrasonography, pathology, gynaecology, minor surgery, eye, orthopaedics, paediatrics, dentistry, ENT, dermatology, physiotherapy, naturopathy and Ayurveda—all units of the OPD and polyclinic need to be upgraded by installation of modern medical equipment and providing specialist doctors.
- **Mobile Medical Unit** – In order to extend health-coverage to 600 remote villages, the centre runs a Mobile Medical Unit (MMU) thrice a week in three base camps, free of cost. As there is need to expand these units, a number of well-equipped ambulances are needed.

• **Women empowerment projects:** Training in vocational, computer, health and paramedical—estimated Cost- one crore.

Essential Infrastructure development (estimated cost of Rs 20 crores):

(a)**New Complex** for 50 beds general hospital and OPD(there is an immediate need to build a separate block for general patients to avoid mixing with the TB patients).

(b)**Building** of quarters for RMO and other staff.

(c)**Renovation** of old buildings, water treatment plant, sinking of deep tube wells, de-silting of check dam for water reservoir, construction of boundary wall and roads within the campus, etc.

• **Permanent Fund -Rs 50 crores corpus:** Inadequacy of government grants and rising prices of drugs & medicines have resulted in a financial crisis, necessitating our building a permanent endowment fund. We earnestly appeal to all to extend their helping hands by making *generous donations for the Permanent Fund* of this institution, and to enable us to continue service to the poor.

All donations to the Sanatorium are exempt from Income Tax u/s 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961. Cheques/Demand drafts may kindly be drawn in favour of ‘**Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium**’ payable at **Ranchi**. All donations will be gratefully accepted and acknowledged.

Yours in the service of the Lord
Swami Buddhadevananda
Secretary



Swami Vivekananda in England and Continental Europe—New Findings

—By Asim Chaudhuri



Swami Vivekananda's visit to the West included the United States of America and nine countries in Europe. This book, which emerged as a natural extension of the first two "New Findings" books by the author, embellishes and adds to the information that has already been published by the Ramakrishna Order. Even after exhaustive research by his predecessors, the author was able to discover many "new findings" that he has carefully, and with painstaking accuracy, weaved into the existing fabric of information that is available on this great soul. Using a time-place-person oriented narrative, the author has included in the book numerous images of places, objects, and buildings so that readers may be transported back to the late nineteenth century Europe, and visually experience Europe through Swamiji's eyes.

Price ₹ 250 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 50 | Pages: lxxxviii + 484



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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

— Swami Vivekananda



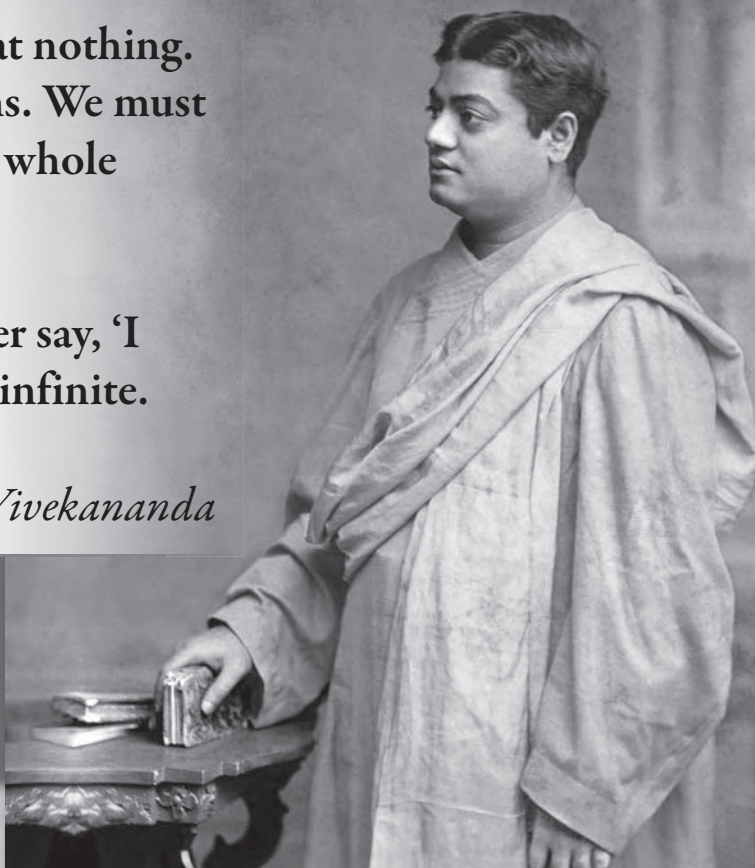
Each soul is potentially divine.
The goal is to manifest this
Divinity within.

Strength is life, weakness is
death.

Fear nothing, stop at nothing.
You will be like lions. We must
rouse India and the whole
world.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I
cannot', for you are infinite.

—*Swami Vivekananda*



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